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Plus KURT COBAIN • ALAN RICKMAN • VINCE VAUGHN

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A dramatic, close-up photograph of two main characters from The Walking Dead. On the left, Michonne (Danai Gurira) is shown from the waist up, wearing a black leather vest over a white shirt. She has her signature braided hair and is holding a large, curved sword (the弯刀) behind her back. On the right, Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus) is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark leather vest over a t-shirt. He has long hair and a beard, and is holding a pair of handcuffs in his hands.

THE WALKING DEAD

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PART 2 OWN IT IN HD ONLY 24 HOURS AFTER BROADCAST



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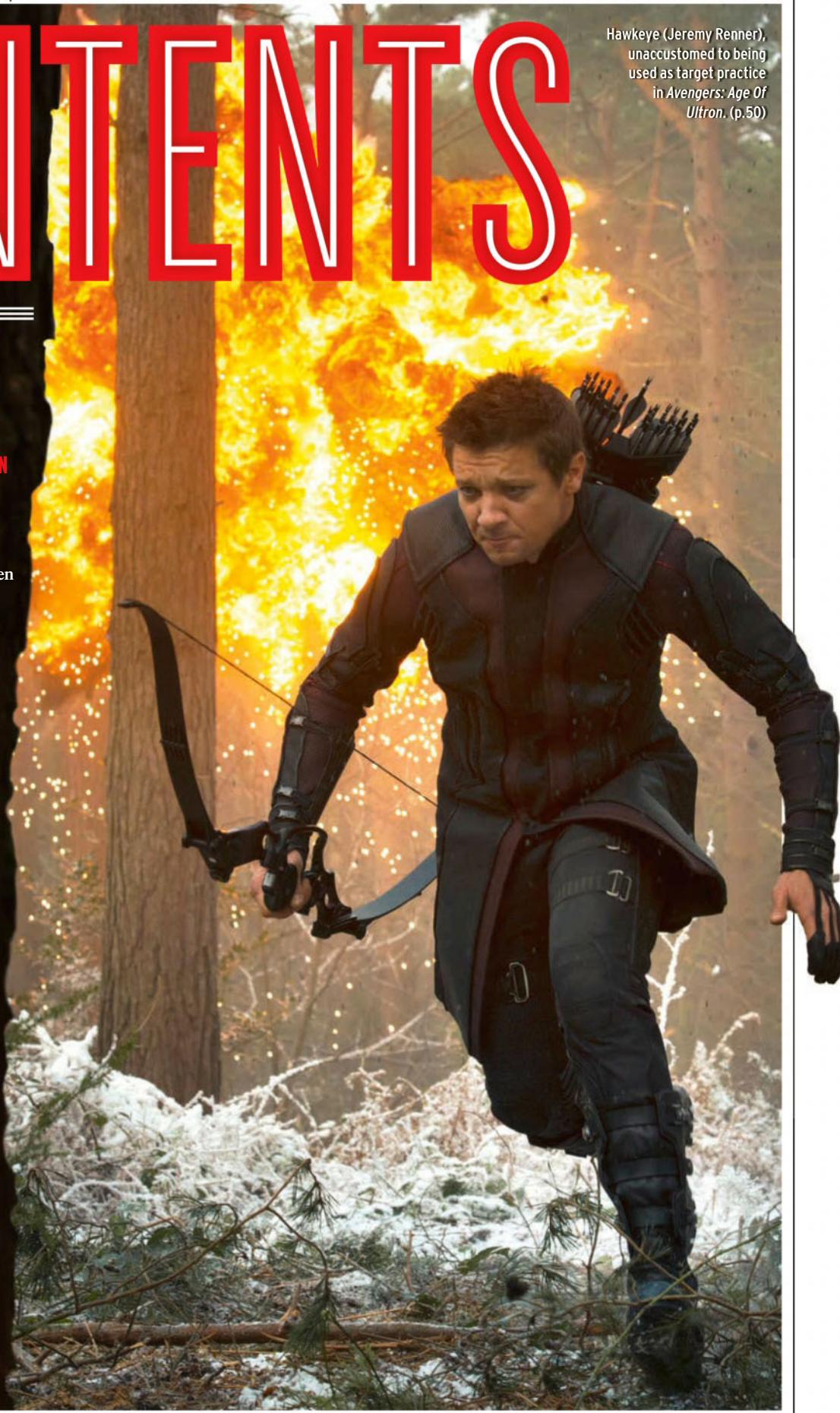
Hans Gruber. Professor Snape. The shit married to Emma Thompson in *Love Actually*. All of them look back on a singular career.

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MARY MAGUIRE

The trailblazing Australian cracked Hollywood in the 1930s, before it all went pear-shaped after marrying a fascist loon. As it sh/ould.

Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner), unaccustomed to being used as target practice in *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*. (p.50)



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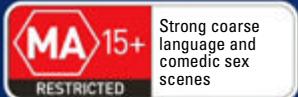
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Giant, in which James Dean quaffs humongo-serum, stomps on NYC and fights Godzilla. Not that we're just guessing from the title or anything.

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CREDITS

THE PITCH

THE COVER MAKES A HELLUVA PROMISE. HOW DO YOU TOP THE BIGGEST SUPERHERO MOVIE of all time? The answer is obvious: by making it bigger. Hence, where our cover from April 2012 featured Iron Man, Thor, Captain America and Black Widow (The Hulk's appearance was Nick Fury-classified at that stage), this issue boasts the full crew, plus allegiance-ambiguous noobs Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch.

But, as the runaway success of the relatively unknown *Guardians Of The Galaxy* last year made clear, such is the shimmering corona of hotness surrounding Marvel that they could release two hours of Avenger chit-chat and shawarma digestion and still blast the box office to smithereens.

Instead, sensibly, we get *Age Of Ultron*, undoubtedly the most ginormous exploration into the ethics and consequences of artificial intelligence in a year full of Asimovian fancies: *Ex Machina* (sexy), *Terminator: Genisys* (shooty) and *Chappie* (cutesy). And with the effervescent and snot-snortingly funny Joss Whedon at the helm for the second and (sadly) last time, our expectations are that the biggerest may be the best at every level: intrigue, moral examination, explosions, inclusion of Norse gods. Join us on set on page 50.

Of course, not everything Marvel touches turns to Vibranium. On page 78, Adam Smith investigates the people and circumstances behind Broadway's biggest ever flop, *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark*. That's right: a Spider-Man musical! What could possibly go wrong? Everything, apparently. Smith's story is guaranteed more entertaining than the profligate disaster that became the talk of New York.

Finally, can you believe there are seven *Fast & Furious* movies now? Neither can the cast, who speak of the franchise's pure entertainment value, the smart decisions and good fortune that contributed to its success and the tragedy that has bound the central players even closer. Ignition commences on page 70.

As ever, enjoy the issue, and stay Marvellous.

Daniel Murphy
Editor

"I kill all of them.
Marvel don't even realise it.
They'll be like **What are we
going to do for Phase 3?**
We literally have no-one!
Except Ant-man!"

p.65

"By the end,
I'm covered in
so much blood."

p.24

"**She's so smart.**
It's a loss to any director
that just moves her
around like a Kate
Winslet Object."

p.89

**CLASSIC
LINES
OF THE
MONTH**

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EMPIRE

(... and our favourite Marvel Cinematic Universe character)

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YOU TALKIN' TO US



LETTER OF THE MONTH

WALKING TO THE SHOPS WITH GRANDDAD: THE MOVIE

→ I've noticed the incredible number of true stories that have been released over the last 18 months. I've counted *The Fifth Estate*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Tracks*, *Diana*, *Mandela*, *Get On Up*, *12 Years A Slave*, *Unbroken*, *Foxcatcher*, *Selma*, *Wild*, *Exodus: Gods And Kings* and a few dozen others. So if anyone wants to adapt my walk to the newsagents to get the morning paper with my Granddad into a movie, just give me a call for the finer details!

Mark Fellowes, Perth, WA

Including Exodus: Gods And Kings there may be a slight stretch, Mark...



EVERY letter printed this month receives a DVD copy of Russell Crowe's directorial debut *The Water Diviner*, the tale of a dad from the Outback (Crowe) who goes to Gallipoli to search for his missing sons.

HAVE YOUR SAY:

MISSION: CORRECT RELEASE DATE

→ Thanks for your March issue of *Empire* with the 200 movies to watch in 2015. Some very exciting films coming our way including some that I can't wait to watch: *Jurassic World*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *SPECTRE*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Terminator Genisys*, *In The Heart Of The Sea*, *Pan*, *Fast & Furious 7*, *Tomorrowland*... too many, aaaargh! However, your information on the *Mission: Impossible 5* release date is no longer up to, er, date. It's been moved to August 6 from December. That means it's coming out in five months! Yay!

Christian Chu, via email

Sadly we went to print before the date was moved Christian, but thanks. Good work, team!

Tweet Us!

I managed just under 100 movies last year and doubt I can make 200. But admire faith of @EmpireAust in me!

Fireworks Gillman
@aussiemeose



ROBBIE YAY, SPIELBERG NAY

→ There are two things I'd like to get off my chest regarding issue #168: 1) In response to Steven Spielberg's recent seminar, 'Woe Is The Film Industry; Filmmakers Just Can't Get Funding; blah-blah' – well, what about these hundreds of upcoming releases? As evidenced in *Empire*, any number of films – covering the entire quality spectrum – have received all manner of budgets. How much danger can the film industry possibly be in? Instead, Mr. Spielberg, take a look at your output of late (*Indiana Jones 4*; *Two-and-a-half-hour Political Speech*, with Daniel Day-Lewis): they might explain your difficulty in obtaining funds. 2) The photo of Margot Robbie on page 89 takes me to my happy place.

Andrew S. Wilkinson, Macquarie, ACT

We don't know where your 'happy place' is, Andrew, but we'd be scared to go there....

SPINE QUOTE HONOUR ROLL

#168

"Erik, what a pleasant surprise."

THE FILM: *X-Men: First Class* (2011)

THE CONNECTION: Said by Kevin Bacon, who starred in *Crazy, Stupid, Love* with Julian Moore, who appears in *Mockingjay - Part 2*.

THE WINNER: *Aedan Kertesi, via email*

THE REWARD: An *Empire* cap for you!

Send answers to
empire@bauer-media.com.au



EMPIRE, AKA THE KING JAMES CAMERON BIBLE

→ Long time reader, first time subscriber. For Christmas my fiancé* gave me the best gift ever: the gift of reading. Now once a month, like clockwork, I'm handed a surprise from the mailbox (which is more than most couples, I'm told.) As I was sitting there, like a theist in a Nolan movie, pondering how to spend my days, it arrived: '200 Movies To Watch In 2015', or as I like to call it, my "King James Cameron Bible." Special mention to your Margot Robbie spread. From every man, ever, keep up the good work. *At the writing of this letter.

Mitchell Page, Perth, WA

Glad your monthly dose of Empire is bringing the joy, Mitchell. Also, henceforth Empire will be officially retitled the King James Cameron Bible.

REMOVE YOUR DIGITS, EMPIRE!

→ After reading Mark Salisbury's 'interview' with Tim Burton (issue #167), I feel compelled to write and ask if Salisbury is aware what a spoiler is. His piece manages to give away the complete plot of *Big Eyes*. Fortunately I had seen it prior to reading the article, but I'm sure there are plenty out there who hadn't. Plenty who were not aware of the back story and whom would have preferred to see it unfold onscreen. I must also mention the *Empire* 'Hot Pick'. If your editor did indeed recommend *Sin City: A Dame To Kill For*, I must question his involvement with a film magazine. Finger out guys, the standards are slipping.

David Philip, via email

Sorry you feel aggrieved, David – it certainly wasn't our intention to spoil anything, as the film's basic plot has been used in all of the marketing materials and reviews for the film anyway. As for Sin City: A Dame To Kill For, the editor takes umbrage to your doubtfulness challenges you to a gentlemanly arm wrestle...

YOUR TOP TEN CLASSICS THAT BOMBED

1. *Fight Club*
2. *The Shawshank Redemption*
3. *Citizen Kane*
4. *2001: A Space Odyssey*
5. *The Wizard Of Oz*
6. *The Big Lebowski*
7. *Blade Runner*
8. *Willy Wonka And The Chocolate Factory*
9. *Vertigo*
10. *It's A Wonderful Life*

1 "I could list a ton, but I'll mention one at least: *Death To Smoochy*. It's a classic in my eyes."

Sean Watts, via Facebook

2 "Maybe more a guilty pleasure than a classic, but I'll go with *Waterworld*!"

Cameron McManus, via Facebook

3 "Labyrinth, *The Thing* and *Children Of Men* are all classics that bombed."

Mitchell Hall, via Facebook

4 "Scarface." (Editor's Note: the film did okay box office, but was met with mostly negative reviews.)

Daniel Pollard, via Facebook

5 "Donnie Darko – Jake Gyllenhaal's first (and best) film role."

Itohan Omoregbee, via email

6 "Cloud Atlas – the book was better, but the movie was still amazing. Why didn't more people see it?"

Jimmy Pickle, via email

7 "Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World – totally underrated in Edgar Wright's filmography!"

Sarah Buckingham, via email

8 "The Iron Giant – Brad Bird might've struck gold with *The Incredibles*, but this is even better."

Andy Kaye, via email

9 "Serenity – proof that Joss Whedon could provide the goods even before *The Avengers*."

Jason Kelly, via email

10 "Office Space – it might've tanked when it came out but now it's a straight up comedy classic! Has plenty of rewatchability."

Adrian Dews, via email

Have an idea for a Top 10 you'd like to see in *Empire*? Email us at empire@bauer-media.com.au or head to www.facebook.com/EmpireAust with your choices.

MAD AT MAD MAX

→ Thanks for the consistently wonderful magazine. Onto other matters. What on Earth is going on with the photoshop skills (or lack thereof) of movie studios? This increasing problem was highlighted with the Tom Hardy *Mad Max: Fury Road* cover (#167). They've made him look creepy when he is a great looking bloke! Do the actors have any input? If you're not convinced, check out any Bruce Willis or Nicolas Cage publicity shot from



the past decade. The dude who painted those epic *Star Wars*/*Indiana Jones* movie posters should teach them a lesson.

Caine Oakham, via email

More like Mad WAX-like model, amirite?! Ahem.

FURIOUS AT FURY ROAD

→ I may be sleep deprived, partially conscious and completely drunk as I write this hundreds of metres high on a new Zealand bound plane, but I still possess the intuitive knowledge that your latest issue of *Empire* (#167) may be your worst yet. A Gibsonless *Mad Max* on the cover? Are you freakin' joking here? You used to appeal to my overtly highbrow tastes but you have sunk as low as a drowned frog with this one. Granted your article on *The Theory Of Everything* was a page turner and your Oscars special hit my happy spot, but giving credence to this monstrosity of an abomination was a real low point for you. Mel Gibson is *Mad Max*, period. I will continue to buy my issue each month as its shiny pages compliment my childlike skin but please pull your head in.

John Botha, Carnegie, VIC

Dear Mrs. Gibson: look, we know you're proud of your son, but it's time to move on, okay?

TO BE OR NOT TO BE, MUTHAF*****

→ Films 147 (*The Hateful Eight*) and 186 (*Macbeth*) of your '200 Movies To Watch In 2015' have given me an idea for a filmic team-up. Shakespeare meets Tarantino: the cinematic goldmine screaming to be dug up! Who better than Q.T. to update the masterful language and blood-thirst of 'The Bard'? Postmodern existential soliloquising, Danish duelling with Spaghetti Western flourishes, classic characters strutting in slow-mo to the latest jam... *Hamlet Unsheathed!* Count me in!

Dylan R, via email

Not a bad idea, Dylan! Our people will talk to your people who'll talk to Q.T.'s people – it's virtually a done deal!

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SEE PAGE 36!

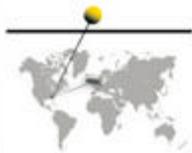
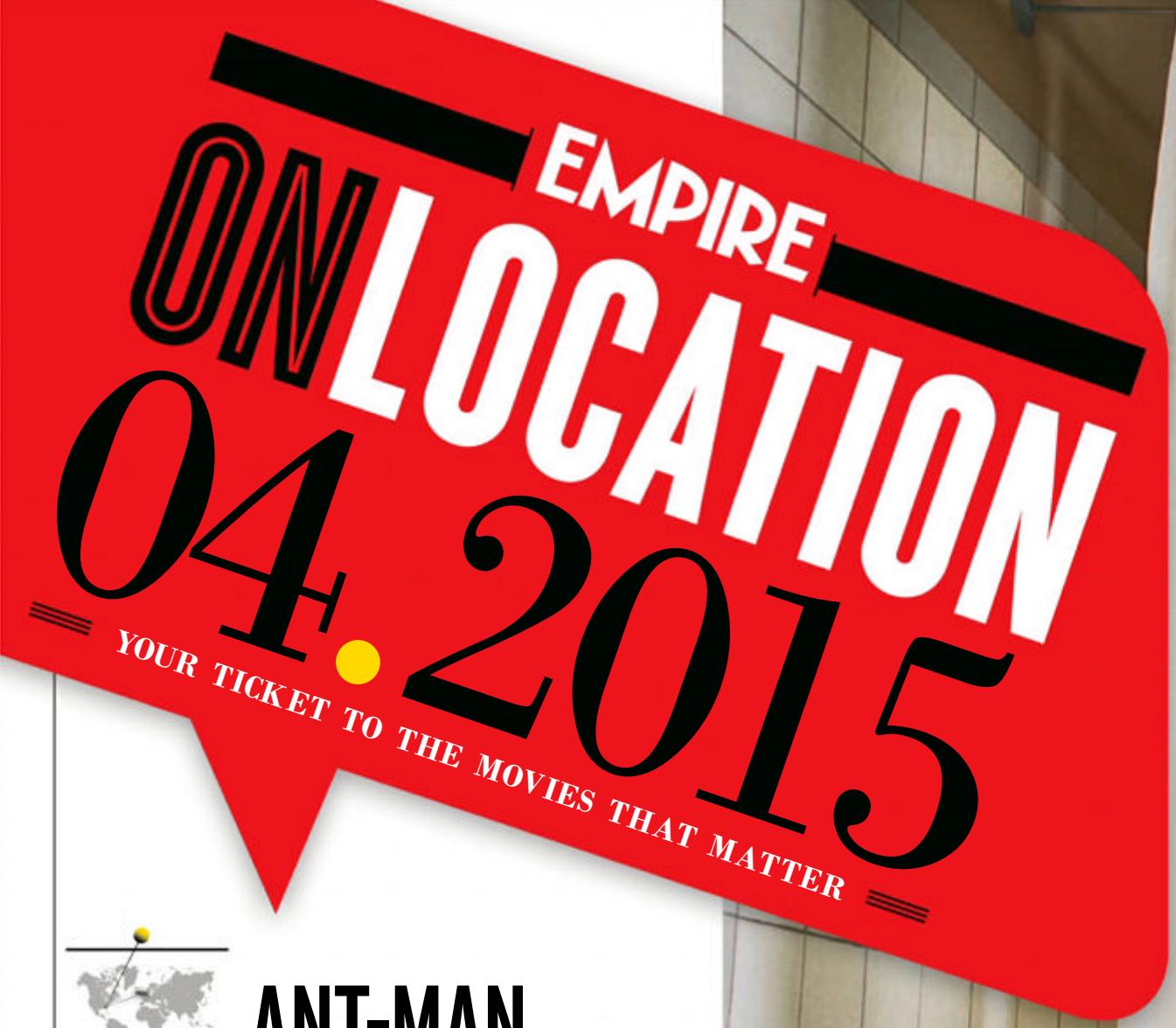
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ANT-MAN

LOCATION: ATLANTA, USA

Marvel thinks small for its next big adventure

NAMASTE." IT'S 11 AM AND Paul Rudd is standing on a crash mat in Pinewood Atlanta Studios' Stage 5, a look of serene concentration on his face. This morning's *Ant-Man* scene takes place in the basement gym of scientist Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) – or, in Rudd's words, "the Pymnasium" – where *Empire* is about to witness a classic training montage in motion. The star is gym-buff. Fake sunlight is streaming through the windows. We can virtually hear the triumphant music swelling on the soundtrack. A new Marvel superhero is being born in front of

our very eyes.

Then a fist socks Rudd in the face, and he goes down hard. "Ooh... Aaah... It huuurts..." he moans into the mat. Not helping matters, his opponent is a lady: Evangeline Lilly, as Hank's daughter Hope, who follows her finishing move by dancing around her flattened foe. As the camera keeps rolling, Rudd attempts to get up, his knee squeaking against the mat in a way that sounds a lot like prolonged flatulence. "Sorry," he says. "I'm on a very restricted diet."

It's hard to imagine Thor quipping about bum-gas, or Iron Man getting his ass whooped by a non-iron lady. But Scott Lang, >



BULLETIN MARION COTILLARD JOINING MICHAEL FASSBENDER IN ASSASSIN'S CREED ➤ NEILL BLOMKAMP WILL



There's a bug
in the bath!

DIRECT NEW ALIEN FILM ➤ KODI SMIT-MCPHEE IS YOUNG NIGHTCRAWLER IN X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

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Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) with Scott Lang (Paul Rudd).

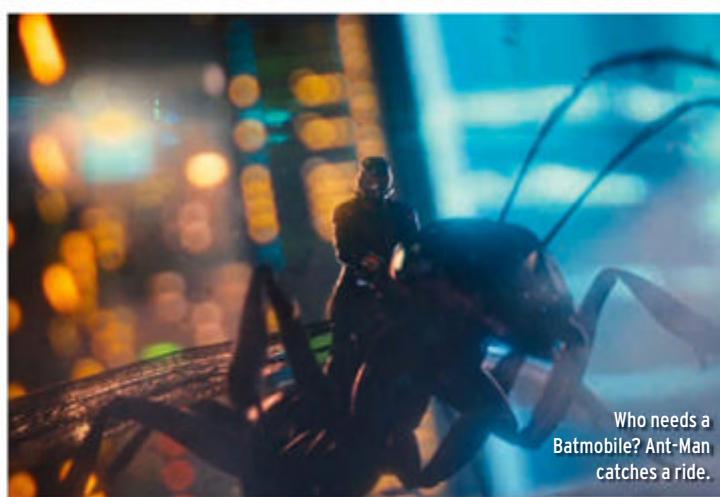
the petty crook who lays his hands on shrinking tech and becomes Ant-Man, is a new kind of Avenger. And right now, judging by the multiple takes involving Rudd repeatedly getting trounced by Hope's Pymkata, despite his stomach-punching, headgear-throwing attempts at foul play, his combat style still needs some work.

"Scott's okay; he knows how to handle himself," Rudd tells us between beat-downs. "But okay is not going to cut it when it comes to fighting her. She knows her stuff." He confides that the knee-fart is a gag he perfected while on a leather chair during the shoot for *I Love You, Man*. "But there are probably cooler things to be known for."

Marvel's *Ant-Man* is a movie with something to prove. Even discounting the media buzz around director Edgar Wright leaving the project, it's following in the raccoon paw-prints of *Guardians Of The Galaxy* and its \$770 million haul. But if Rudd and new director Peyton Reed are feeling the pressure, neither is showing it. Throughout the day, the pair keep a running joke going about Fontis, a brand of bottled water, provided by the studio, that no-one has heard of. Reed hides bottles round the sets, throwing Rudd into fits of



Rudd spots a Fontis bottle.



Who needs a Batmobile? Ant-Man catches a ride.

THE INSIDE TRACK

EVANGELINE LILLY'S STUNT DOUBLE IS RENAE MONEYMAKER. RENAE'S SISTER HEIDI IS SCARLETT JOHANSSON'S STUNT DOUBLE.

laughter when he comes across them mid-take. The star, in turn, has started ad-libbing fake Fontis ads to camera, Brian Fantana-style.

With only a 20-person crew, the shoot has a pace more typical of an indie than a blockbuster, though among that crew is *Titanic* cinematographer Russell Carpenter. "The tone of this film is unique," says Reed, who is buzzing between the sets and a macro-photography unit. "It has drama, it has comedy, it has a hero with a shitty van and a cut under his eye."

It will also have, if all goes according to plan, mind-blowing visual effects and action sequences that kids can faithfully recreate at home with their Paul Rudd action figure. "Crazy, isn't it?" marvels Marvel's latest icon. "Though there actually is already an *Anchorman* action figure of me. I look like a cross between Wolverine and Robert Goulet."

NICK DE SEMLYEN

ANT-MAN IS OUT ON JULY 16.

► BRYAN CRANSTON AND DIANE KRUGER TO STAR IN *THE INFILTRATOR* ► NEW LINE PLANNING A NEW SHAFT

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Sasha Stone, Awards Daily



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SHAUN THE SHEEP: THE MOVIE

LOCATION: AARDMAN STUDIOS, BRISTOL

How the big-screen take on Aardman's TV hit is *Ferris Bueller's Day Off...* with farm animals

PHOTOGRAPHY MARY MCCARTNEY

T'S THE DETAIL THAT COUNTS ON an Aardman movie. On the day that *Empire* visits the set of *Shaun The Sheep*, one poor soul is cheerily spending the day animating the jangling of some keys. It's something you likely won't even notice in the film, but perfection in the visuals is more important in *Shaun* than probably any other movie the studio has produced. *Shaun*, you see, doesn't talk.

To bring the uninitiated up to speed: *Shaun*, a minor character in the *Wallace and Gromit* short *A Close Shave*, has had his own kids'

TV show since 2007, comprising 130 seven-minute episodes documenting his comedic life on a farm with a doltish farmer and a beleaguered dog (all dogs in the Aardman world are beleaguered, evidently). None of the characters speak, beyond the odd baa or garbled honk.

"We weren't initially fully sure that it would work without dialogue," says co-director Richard Starzack. "We did look at some fallback positions, like having songs that would explain what was going on... But after we did our first 30-minute reel, it was



Model behaviour:
creating the goofy but
adorable Slip the dog.

► EWAN MCGREGOR SET TO DIRECT AMERICAN PASTORAL ► SCARLETT JOHANSSON TO TAKE THE PSYCHOPATH



Setting the scene: an Aardman animator in situ on one of the sets.



Shaun and the gang flock to get a better view of the action on the farm.



The flock baa-rave it in the city disguised as humans, in the hope they will find their lost farmer.

THE INSIDE TRACK
TWENTY ANIMATORS WORKED ON THE FILM, EACH PRODUCING TWO SECONDS OF FOOTAGE PER DAY. FASTER THAN MOST STOP-MOTION.

obvious it would work."

Finding a template for Shaun's first adventure outside the boundaries of his field took in some surprising sources of inspiration. "Well, we knew we had to get out of the farm," says Starzack. "So, we decided on a city." The farmer accidentally winds up in the city after a mishap with a caravan, his memory wiped out by a blow to the head, and Shaun and his flock have to find him and get him home. "One of the first films we looked at was Cliff Richard's *Summer Holiday*," says Starzack. "We thought there

might be something there, with everyone travelling round on a bus, but we put that aside quite quickly... Then one of our major inspirations was actually *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. It's a film where the main character doesn't change much, but changes those around him." Ed Rooney, the mishap-prone teacher from *Ferris*

Bueller, was the key inspiration for the villain, an animal catcher named Trumper.

There is an image of clay-based stop-motion animation as something arcane and quaint, made all but redundant by computers. But you only have to look at a few seconds of Aardman's animation to see that it's as expressive as anything created digitally. "Being asked to direct an Aardman film was, for me, like being asked to drive a Rolls Royce," says Starzack's co-director Mark Burton. "Everything you're given and

everyone you work with is the best you can get." Adds Starzack, "I remember seeing a piece on TV talking about the 'dying art of stop-frame animation', which made me bristle. Production is increasing for us, if anything. It's certainly more home-spun than computer animation, but I think people like that."

Ten Oscar nominations and close to a billion in box-office dollars suggest they are still right.
OLLY RICHARDS

SHAUN THE SHEEP: THE MOVIE IS OUT ON MARCH 26 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 48.

TEST > MORENA BACCARIN LANDS TOP ROLE IN DEADPOOL > WILL SMITH TO STAR IN THRILLER BOUNTY

EMPIRE
ON LOCATION
04.2015

Melanie the fun-loving student/bartender (Cara Delevingne) and Thomas the filmmaker (Daniel Brühl).



THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

LOCATION: SIENA, ITALY

Michael Winterbottom tackles the Amanda Knox case... Kinda

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY YOU GET A cocktail handmade by a supermodel. But then, visiting a Michael Winterbottom set is never really just a normal day's work. On a freezing December night in the beautiful medieval town of Siena, Italy, *Empire* is watching the star of Winterbottom's latest, Daniel Brühl, walk in and out of a tiny bar, when word comes from one of the crew that, "Cara would like to make you a mojito." Cara is Cara Delevingne, the cover star of every upscale women's magazine last year, and suddenly she's bounding over with a mojito in each hand, having trained specially as a bartender for her part.

The film is called *The Face Of An Angel*, which is, she says, "a story about a crime that has happened in Italy – a British student is suspected to have been killed by an American student. But it's really the journey of Daniel's character, a filmmaker

THE INSIDE TRACK
NICK PISA, A SKY REPORTER IN THE UK, APPEARS AS HIMSELF. BARBIE LATZA NADEAU, WHO WROTE THE BOOK *ANGEL FACE*, PLAYS A REPORTER.



Thomas with journalist
Simone Ford
(Kate Beckinsale).

called Thomas who is making a film about this crime, and he discovers that he's not really in the right state of mind to do it."

If the words "Italy", "crime" and "British student" ring a bell, that's because *The Face Of An Angel* is – and yet is also not – about the murder of Meredith Kercher in Perugia, Italy, 2007. The names are not the same, the setting has moved, and no thoughts are expressed as to the

guilt or innocence of the three people accused of killing her. But at the same time, all the facts tally – on the advice of BBC Films' legal team, since the movie is loosely based on a non-fiction account of the trial: *Angel Face*, by Barbie Latza Nadeau. Brühl admits he was initially concerned about getting involved with a film based on such a "gossipy" case. "But I read the script anyway," he says, "and I soon realised that it's actually not about this case, it's a story on its own."

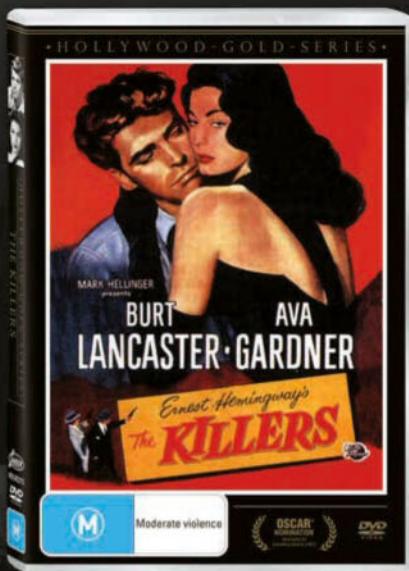
Why did he agree? "I admire Michael's curiosity in things. His unconventional approach to stories. He's always eager to search for something, and he's not interested in clear answers. When you read everything about this case, you come to the conclusion that sometimes there is no such thing as a simple truth. Sometimes it's impossible to tell a simple story and come to a simple end."

DAMON WISE

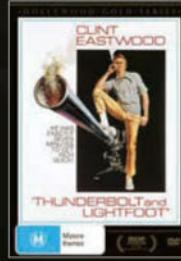
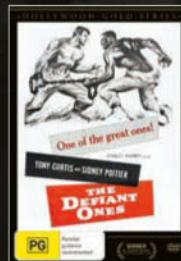
THE FACE OF AN ANGEL IS OUT IN 2015.

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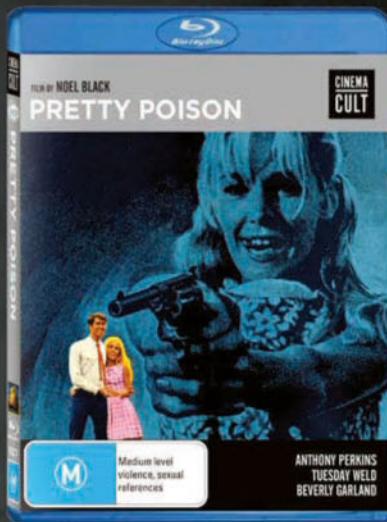
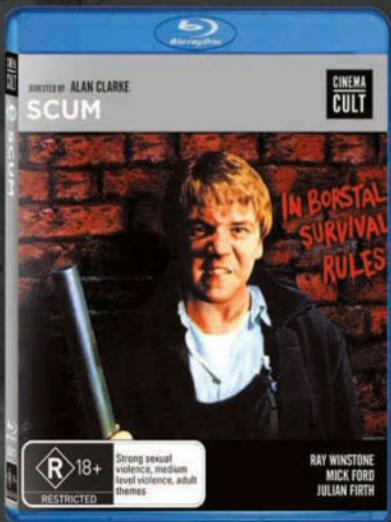
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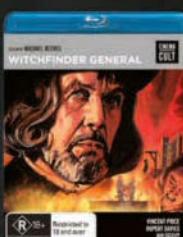
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EMPIRE

THE SLATE

— NEWS ETC. —

THE FACE

KATHERINE WATERSTON

Inherent Vice's biggest virtue

KATHERINE WATERSTON'S APPEARANCE IN *Inherent Vice* is testament to the power of patience. "Paul [Thomas Anderson] contacted me around the time of *The Master* and he said, 'Maybe we'll find something for you,' and I never heard from him again," she laughs. "So when he came calling, I said, 'Oh sure, I've heard this before...'"

Waterston is the sharp standout in the haze of PTA's pot-fuelled private-eye movie as Joaquin Phoenix's "ex-old lady", Shasta Fay Hepworth, most memorably in a provocative extended nude scene. "There is a general assumption that those scenes are very challenging for actresses to do," she says, "but my job is to leave my concern for myself at the door and play the part."

The daughter of *Law & Order* veteran Sam, the 34-year-old's film career should rocket off the back of *Vice*, reducing the chances she'll have to fall back on photography, which she studied at college to pay the bills. "I haven't picked up a camera in ages!" she laughs. "I've been meaning to. I miss it." JAMES WHITE

INHERENT VICE IS OUT ON MARCH 12 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 43.



KATIE HOLMES IS



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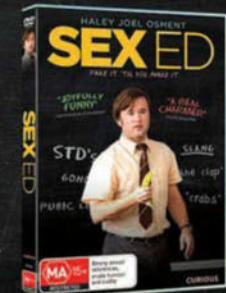
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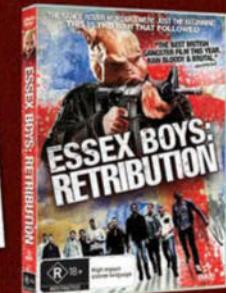
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FIRST
LOOK

THE SUNDANCE KIDS

**EMPIRE'S FAVES FROM THIS YEAR'S SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL.
KEEP 'EM PEELED FOR THESE INDIE BREAKOUTS...**



1 COP CAR

Two adolescent boys find an abandoned police car in a field and take it for a joyride in this small but tight genre piece that plays as a cross between *The Goonies* and *Blood Simple*. Kevin Bacon plays the now-vehicle-less corrupt sheriff who sets out in hot pursuit of the pair, praying he'll get his hands on them before they look inside the boot...



2 DOPE

A funky, African-American mash-up of *Go* and *Y Tu Mamá También*, Rick Famuyiwa's comic thriller was the adrenaline fun-blast that the festival needed, centring on three high school nerds who chance upon industrial loads of MDMA which they have to dispose of for profit to appease the local Mr. Big.

Above: James Marsden and Jack Black 'enjoy' a fine bromance in *The D Train*.

Below: Keanu Reeves is under siege in *Knock Knock*.

3 THE D TRAIN

Awkward sex comedies were this year's thing, but none hit the spot quite as well as this, in which a dormant man-crush leads the nerdy Dan (Jack Black) to set out in pursuit of his high school's heartthrob (James Marsden), now an actor, to invite him to their reunion. For toe-curling discomfort, this was the film to beat.

4 KNOCK KNOCK

Eli Roth abandons horror – well, sort of – for this outrageous romp, in which two sexually voracious strangers chance upon a married man (Keanu Reeves) one rainy night, and inveigle their way into his home. *Fatal Attraction* has nothing on this, a dark, female vigilante story that's sexy and scary – in a cross-your-legs kinda way.



BUSTIN' OUT

MEET YOUR NEW GHOSTBUSTERS



5 JAMES WHITE

After small parts in *Girls* and *A Most Violent Year*, Christopher Abbott became a Sundance star with a terrific performance in Josh Mond's powerful New York-set drama, in which a troubled writer deals with his father's death and prepares to spend the last months with his cancer-stricken mother (Cynthia Nixon). Not to be confused with *Empire's* Man In Los Angeles, James White.



6 MISTRESS AMERICA

Reunited with his *Frances Ha* star Greta Gerwig, Noah Baumbach sketches another slice of hipster life in this sophisticated and witty comedy, with newcomer Lola Kirke as a college freshman who uses her pretentious but endearing stepsister-to-be (Gerwig) as the foundation for a writing project.



7 TANGERINE

Filmed on the iPhone 5 – with a lot of technical know-how – Sean Baker's fifth feature is a sometimes jaw-droppingly funny buddy movie about two transvestite hookers on Christmas Eve in Hollywood. The setting is sordid, replete with pimps, drugs and, of course, sex, but the storytelling is soulful and the characters real and unforgettable.



8 THE HALLOW

Of all the horrors screening in the Midnight section, this UK production by Corin Hardy, the director of the upcoming *The Crow* reboot, really showed how it should be done, conjuring up *Evil Dead*-style scares in a rural Irish setting as a new family unwittingly incur the wrath of local spirits. Edgar Wright gave his seal of approval by hosting a rocking post-screening Q&A.



9 PEOPLE, PLACES, THINGS

Flight Of The Conchords' Jemaine Clement is the standout in this gentle relationship comedy about a graphic artist and father of two girls who finds himself dealing unexpectedly with divorce. Clement's subtle, hangdog comic stylings are perfectly in sync with director James C. Strouse's bittersweet script.



10 THE WITCH

Britain's Anya Taylor-Joy became an instant Sundance face with her first major acting role, playing the daughter of a family of devout pilgrims who are banished from their settlement and set up house near the woods of New England. Eeriness and witchery abound in this historically detailed and often disturbing chiller.

DAMON WISE



So this is the new Fab Four. True to his word, director Paul Feig has sourced the new Ghostbusters for his reboot – and they're all women. Funny women, to be more precise. Here's our guide to the ladies who'll be crossing the streams come next year.

MELISSA McCARTHY

Seemingly Feig's spirit animal, McCarthy was always a safe bet to star in the new movie, which will be her fourth in a row with the director, following *Bridesmaids*, *The Heat* and this year's *Spy*.

Busted ghosts? She voices a character in the forthcoming animated film, *B.O.O.: Bureau Of Otherworldly Operations*, so yes.

GHOSTBUSTERS CROSSOVER:

She starred with Bill Murray in last year's *St. Vincent*.

KRISTEN WIIG

The *Bridesmaids* writer/star was also heavily tipped to reteam with Feig on *Ghostbusters*. So versatile, she'd make a perfect Venkman. Or Stantz. Or Spengler. Or Zeddemore.

Busted ghosts? Not particularly, although she did encounter aliens in 2011's *Paul*.

GHOSTBUSTERS CROSSOVER: In that same movie, she was menaced by Sigourney Weaver.

LESLIE JONES

A late-blooming *Saturday Night Live* writer-performer, the 47-year-old Jones caught Feig's eye with her performances on the show, which she joined in 2014. Given that Bill Murray and Dan Aykroyd had *SNL* backgrounds, Feig seems happy to mine the same seam this time.

Busted ghosts? Not a one. She's a newbie.

GHOSTBUSTERS CROSSOVER: Not yet.

KATE MCKINNON

Another *Saturday Night Live* cast member, McKinnon joined the show in 2012, effectively replacing Wiig, and has been nominated for two Emmys for her work on the show.

Busted ghosts? She did voice a character in *Toy Story Of Terror*. Otherwise, not really.

GHOSTBUSTERS CROSSOVER: Not really, no. Unless Bill Murray had a cameo in her TV show, *Vag Magazine*.

CHRIS HEWITT

THE GHOSTBUSTERS REBOOT WILL BE OUT JULY 21, 2016.

THE SLATE

We have lift-off.
Tom Hiddleston as
Dr. Robert Laing in
Ben Wheatley's
High-Rise.

FIRST
LOOK

RISING UP

HIDDLESTON AND EVANS GO WILD IN BEN WHEATLEY'S *HIGH-RISE*



EPIC SCALE

WHY MOVIES SHOULD STEER CLEAR OF SKYSCRAPERS

ILLUSTRATION
CRAIG ROBINSON

THE RAID

Name: Jakartan slum.
Height: 15 storeys.
What goes wrong? Massive shoot-out with a squad of, erm, raiding cops.
Is it a real building? No.

GHOSTBUSTERS

Name: Spook Central.
Height: 19 storeys.
What goes wrong? Invasion by demonic entity, devil dogs and self-cooking eggs.
Is it a real building? Go to 55 Central Park West in New York City.

DIE HARD

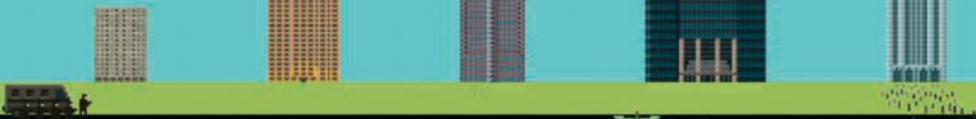
Name: Nakatomi Plaza.
Height: 35 storeys.
What goes wrong? Eurotrash terrorists gatecrash the Christmas party. Ho-ho-ho.
Is it a real building? Yes. Fox Plaza in LA.

GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH

Name: Clamp Center.
Height: 49 storeys.
What goes wrong? An infestation of Gremlins.
Is it a real building? You can find the exterior at 101 Park Avenue, New York.

LAND OF THE DEAD

Name: Fiddler's Green.
Height: 60 storeys approx.
What goes wrong? Zombie invasion. Totally bites.
Is it a real building? It's a composite of two Pittsburgh buildings, Oxford Centre and PPG Place.





Luke Evans's Richard Wilder goes off the deep end. With his singlet on.

THERE ARE MANY REASONS TO LOOK forward to *High-Rise*. It's the latest, and possibly craziest, film to date from Ben Wheatley – and when you consider that he's directed *Kill List*, *Sightseers* and *A Field In England*, that's saying something. An adaptation of the J.G. Ballard novel about the disintegration of the denizens of a London tower block in 1975, it promises to be challenging, evocative, violent, deranged, darkly funny, bewildering and gripping.

And then, if all that isn't enough, there's its astonishing cast, including Jeremy Irons, Sienna Miller, Elisabeth Moss, James Purefoy, Reece Shearsmith and, as polar opposites whose paths will fatefully cross as everything falls apart, Luke Evans and Tom Hiddleston.

Seen here in our exclusive first look shot, Evans's Richard Wilder is a documentary maker who descends into

feral anarchy as civilisation breaks down within the block's concrete walls. Evans, who'll reteam with Wheatley on the Martin Scorsese-produced thriller *Free Fire*, retained his Welsh accent for the role, and drew inspiration from a classic firebrand from the valleys. "If you look at Oliver Reed from 1975, he basically has hair like this," says Evans. "Wilder is this brash, drinking, ladies' man, but then you realise there's a whole different thing going on there. He's the people's warrior, he's the defender of his class, he's very Welsh."

Hiddleston, meanwhile, plays the film's antihero, Robert Laing, a coolly analytical surgeon who is intrigued by the devolution that takes place, over the course of just a few days, within the apartment block. "The building is turning people into territorial animals," says Hiddleston. "And Laing has this extraordinary physical and

emotional control, which presents a mystery for everyone in the high rise. But slowly the mask is peeled away. On one level, it's adult and sophisticated and is about adults misbehaving, with all the glamour and mischief and elegance that comes with that. The rest is just raw and wild, with rage, violence and a feral human nature. You don't normally get a chance to do that, to just go off the deep end."

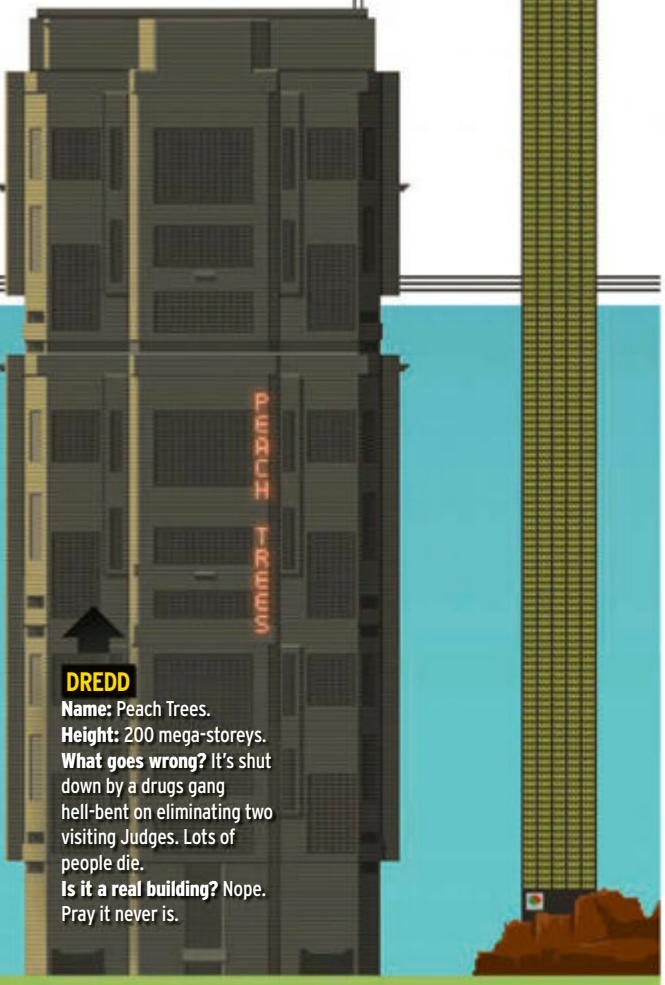
As is the case with Wheatley's films to date, the deep end will involve claret. Buckets of the stuff. Don't be fooled by Evans and Hiddleston's pristine appearances here. "By the end, I'm covered in so much blood," laughs Evans. "If there's level one and level 10, I'm level 15. It's shocking, but really fun."

CHRIS HEWITT

HIGH-RISE IS OUT THIS LATER THIS YEAR.

THE LEGO MOVIE

Name: The Octan Tower.
Height: Infinity storeys.
What goes wrong? Attacked by rebels led by Chris Pratt.
Is it a real building? With enough LEGO bricks, it could be.



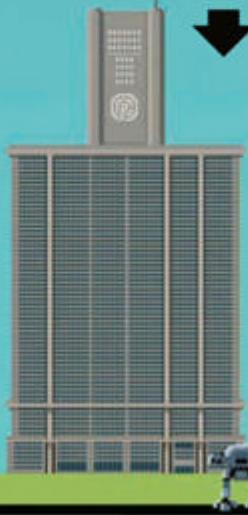
THE AVENGERS

Name: Stark Tower.
Height: 93 storeys approx.
What goes wrong? It's the base for an alien invasion of Earth.
Is it a real building? The MetLife building in NYC is the basis of the Tower. Extra floors are bolted on.



ROBOCOP

Name: OCP Tower.
Height: 220 storeys approx.
What goes wrong? A battle between two robot policemen.
Is it a real building? City Hall, Dallas, with a matte painting extension.



THE TOWERING INFERNO

Name: The Glass Tower.
Height: 138 storeys.
What goes wrong? A huge fire breaks out, killing almost everyone except O.J. Simpson.
Is it a real building? No.



DREDD

Name: Peach Trees.
Height: 200 mega-storeys.
What goes wrong? It's shut down by a drugs gang hell-bent on eliminating two visiting Judges. Lots of people die.
Is it a real building? Nope. Pray it never is.

FIVE THINGS
=====

TOP FIVE

Chris Rock takes us inside his romcom

1

QUITE POSSIBLY THE best romcom in ages, *Top Five* sees faded movie star Andre Allen (Chris Rock, who also wrote and directed) fall for the *New York Times* writer (Rosario Dawson) assigned to interview him. It's not as far-fetched as it may seem. "Kevin Smith, who's a friend of mine, married a journalist," says Rock of the film's origin. "There's something cute and romantic about that."

2

IN FACT, ROCK CAME close to playing a newspaperman himself relatively recently, as ace snapper and danger magnet Jimmy Olsen in Tim Burton's now shelved *Superman Lives*. "I remember getting fitted for costumes," he says. "But Jimmy Olsen is always a bad part. You're tied up with something while Superman does his thing."

3

ANDRE IS HAUNTED by an action franchise: *Hammy The Bear*, about a cop in a furry body suit. "When I'm on tour for a *Madagascar* movie, often I'll get to a country and my voice has been replaced by a local actor," Rock explains. "I'm like, 'Am I doing press for a movie I'm technically not in?' I thought that was a funny idea: Andre's famous for films he doesn't even have to be there for."

4

ROCK GOT A-LIST pals to cameo. "This guy's a famous comedian, so Jerry Seinfeld, Adam Sandler and Whoopi Goldberg would be at his bachelor party," he says of a scene in which Seinfeld riffs on sex toys and flings cash in the air. "We had to cut this great joke he did about mistresses: 'It's not the two women that kill you. It's the two dinners.'"

5

A MOST MEMORABLE sequence is a threesome involving Andre and two girls, that becomesickier when Cedric The Entertainer shows up. "My DP was Manuel Alberto Claro, who did the *Nymphomaniacs*, so this was nothing!" Rock says. "I don't mind taking my clothes off on set. You go, 'I should do more sit-ups. It's not enough to quit bread.'" **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

TOP FIVE IS OUT ON MARCH 12.



MAN ON TRAIN

SALUTING SCENE-STEALERS

#3 PRESIDENT SNOW'S STYLIST #1, *THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY – PART 1*

IN A FILM THAT'S PACKED wall-to-wall with heated debates, it should come as no surprise that Jordan Woods-Robinson's brief moment of 'action' in *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* sticks in the memory. As the stylist to Donald Sutherland's evil President Snow, he accidentally nicks his boss while shaving him with a straight razor. In countless movies past, this would spell immediate doom for the poor cowering cove, but not this time. "Donald knew ignoring me was the most menacing option... a teasing silence when he could have beheaded me."

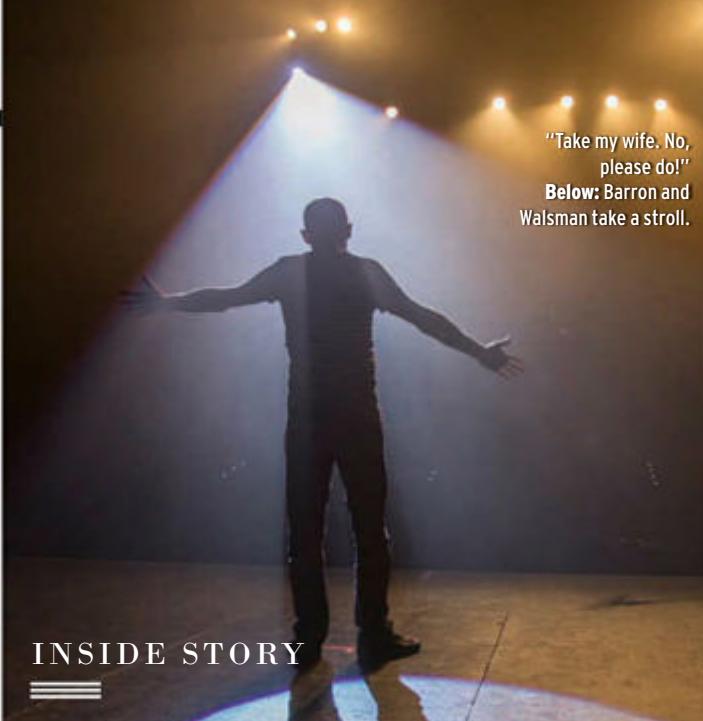
Woods-Robinson bagged the part after four months of auditions. The experience has stayed with him, describing director Francis Lawrence as "the kindest man, with absolute control of his ideas".

Next up, he has a small part in the Anthony Hopkins-Colin Farrell movie *Solace*, while he's also a member of the Blue Man Group, which he says helped him prepare for *Hunger Games*. "It was a lot of physicality, telling the story just with my body."

Alas, it looks unlikely we'll see him in *Mockingjay – Part 2*. Perhaps President Snow did have him beheaded, after all. "My fate was left to the imagination," laughs the actor, "but I like to think Snow forgave me and we became best friends. *Mockingjay – Part 3* is just President Snow and his stylist..."

ROB LEANE

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY – PART 1 IS OUT NOW ON HOME FORMATS.



INSIDE STORY

STAGE FRIGHT

Australia's favourite funny guy Carl Barron tries to turn his frown upside down...

T'S A SERIOUS BUSINESS BEING FUNNY. JUST ASK CARL BARRON, AUSTRALIA'S most successful stand-up comedian and soon-to-be-film-star. He has just trodden the boards of Sydney's State Theatre to film some of the climatic moments of *Manny Lewis*, the very loosely autobiographical tale of a shy, awkward comedian. "It was tricky", understates the funnyman.

"I wanted to show people what it is like on the road as a known comic", explains Barron. "People have seen one side of me on stage for years so this is something different."

Manny Lewis is the brainchild of Barron and his friend, co-writer and director Anthony Mir. "Carl and I go way back – we've known each other for 20 years," explains Mir. "I met him at his first night of stand-up. I was awestruck. I couldn't believe someone could get so many laughs so easily by just standing there and rubbing his forehead!" He continues, "I've been trying to get Carl to do something outside of stand-up for about a decade."

The comedy-drama tells the story of the titular Manny, a successful mirth merchant who spends his off-stage hours throwing a me party on the lonely streets of King's Cross.

His only human contact: his long-serving manager (Damien Garvey), the barman at his local pub and a sultry voice on a phone sex line. That is until he meets Maria, played by Leeanna Walsman. "It's a beautiful story. A sweet romantic comedy," explains the actress.

"Although I'm sure if you asked Carl he'd say something else!"

DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

MANNY LEWIS IS OUT ON MARCH 12 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 40.



"Take my wife. No, please do!"
Below: Barron and Walsman take a stroll.

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IN BLOOM

BRETT MORGAN TALKS HIS NEW KURT COBAIN DOCUMENTARY

MONTAGE OF HECK IS THE NAME of a frenetic mixtape of influences that Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain assembled in the late 1980s. As soon as director Brett Morgen heard it, while digging through Cobain's archives, he realised it should also be the title of his film about the singer's short, dramatic and often misunderstood life. "The tape is funny, it's scary, it's exhilarating, it's visceral," says Morgen. "It's like a portal into Kurt Cobain. It's everything I wanted the film to be."

There have been documentaries about Cobain, notably Nick Bloomfield's *Kurt & Courtney* from 1998. But Kurt and Courtney's daughter, Frances Bean, is an executive producer here, though Morgen says that the family dictated no agenda and demanded no cuts. Like him, they wanted the whole picture. "The movie is as unflinching a look at an icon as one is likely to see," he says. "A movie about Kurt Cobain should not be selling a fantasy. It should be nothing but honest."

Morgen, erroneously linked with a Cobain biopic in development at Working Title, doesn't think of his movies as documentaries. "They're not so much films about a subject as films meant to personify a subject," says the man who previously directed films about Robert Evans (*The Kid Stays In The Picture*) and

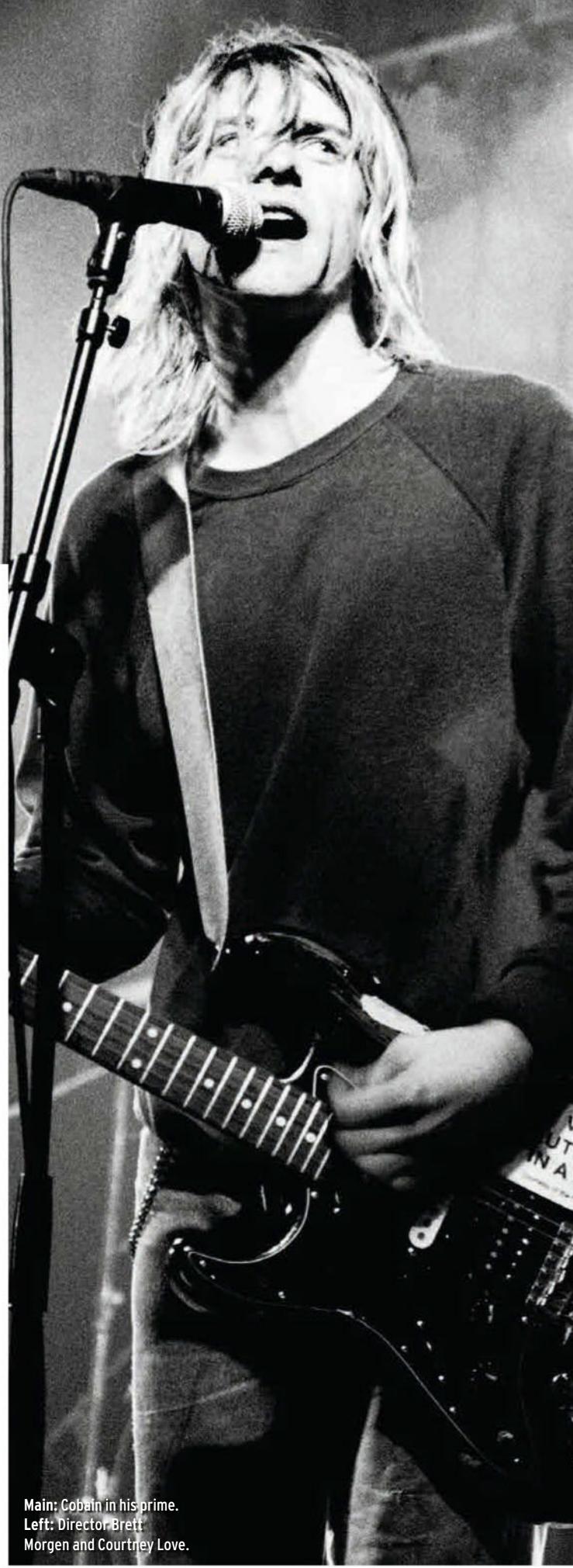
The Rolling Stones (*Crossfire Hurricane*). "This film is an attempt to really get inside Kurt and present the world through his eyes. I was blessed to have a subject as creative and revealing in so many different mediums as Kurt."

Nirvana's gamechanging 1991 album *Nevermind* was a pivotal cultural event for Morgen and he pursued this project with a fan's zeal. He met with Cobain's widow Courtney Love in 2007 and finally secured funding five years later. Making scant use of talking heads and publicly available footage, *Montage Of Heck* illustrates Cobain's inner life by drawing on vast quantities of previously unglimped material: unheard music (including a powerful Beatles cover version), artwork, childhood Super 8 movies, a privately narrated memoir of Cobain's teenage years, and 40 hours of home video of Kurt and Courtney in 1992. "It might possibly be the most intimate vérité footage that I've ever experienced," says Morgen. "The audience is going to be invited into Kurt and Courtney's private world."

The result, he says, is a deep dive into a man who was far funnier, more romantic and more complex than his fans could have known. "There was much more to Kurt than I had realised. It's almost like spending a long evening with a distant relative who you barely knew."

DORIAN LYNKEY

KURT COBAIN: MONTAGE OF HECK IS OUT LATER IN 2015.



Main: Cobain in his prime.
Left: Director Brett Morgen and Courtney Love.

THINGS WE'VE
LEARNED



INSIDE STORY

FOLLOW THIS

Inside 2015's first great horror

EVERY TIME I'M ASKED TO describe this movie I don't quite know how to do it," says Maika Monroe, the lead in David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows*. It's not surprising, as the film is quite unlike anything else out there. You could call it a horror movie, because it's terrifying, but even that's not quite accurate. Monroe, cementing the new Scream Queen credentials she established in *The Guest*, plays a teenager who has sex with a new boyfriend and is then told by him that

he's passed a curse on to her, which will see her pursued by a slow-moving figure that changes appearance, is only visible to her, and will brutally kill her if it catches her. The only way to stop it is to pass on the curse by having sex with someone new. "When I first read it I wasn't sure about it," Monroe admits. "It was so bizarre and such a hard thing to make a movie about. But then I met David."

Like many an odd idea, *It Follows* came to Mitchell in a dream when he was young. "I remember this nightmare where I was playing outside school and I saw this kid walking very slowly toward me. None of my friends could see them and I knew something was very wrong," he says. "That idea of being followed by something you could easily get away from, but doesn't stop, scared me." He later married that idea to sexual transmission because, "I liked the idea of passing something on, and sex seemed to make sense." We won't quibble.

OLLY RICHARDS

IT FOLLOWS IS OUT LATER IN 2015.



Dave Bautista was so proud of *Empire's* *Guardians Of The Galaxy* cover that he brought it with him to Britain while shooting *Spectre*.



Comedian Carl Barron really enjoys a good cup of tea. His plan when new movie *Manny Lewis* opens? Cuppa at home.



Douglas Booth had a sex scene with Emma Watson cut from Darren Aronofsky's *Noah*. Insert your own 'going in two by two' joke here.



Aussie Teresa Palmer shot several scenes of new thriller *2:22* with 'I ♥ MB' written on her foot by husband Mark Webber in fluro orange.



FIRST
LOOK

MOMMY DEAREST

HOW *MOMMY* IS SENDING CINEMA'S LATEST WUNDERKIND INTO THE MAINSTREAM

THE NEW PEDRO ALMODÓVAR IS A 25-year-old French-Canadian tyro who has made five phenomenal films in as many years, is one of the finest young talents in world cinema, and is sparky, caustic and inventive. And he really doesn't take kindly to it when you label him the new Pedro Almodóvar. "I've only ever seen four of his movies!" Xavier Dolan protests. "I'm wondering how people can draw parallel lines, except for the fact that we love women who are rather angry and wear stilettos. And the fact that we are both gay."

A woman who's rather angry features prominently in Dolan's latest, *Mommy*, which came very close to winning the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival last year. A study of a suburban mother whose teen son is making her life difficult, *Mommy* features one of the strongest roles for women in recent history, played with warmth and purpose

by the astonishing Anne Dorval. "It's not a difficult thing for me to write for women and understand women," shrugs the über-confident Dolan. "It's actually the easiest thing for me, out of all the things you face while you're making a film... I love intense and flawed characters."

Dolan is a big deal, and becoming increasingly bigger. His next movie, *The Death And Life Of John F. Donovan*, sees him team up with Jessica Chastain, who's a huge fan of his. It seems that he's getting closer to the mainstream in his old age. "I don't think about that," he says. "I want to progress. I want to get better and better. As a human being first, then as an artist. I work in doubt a lot. I doubt everything. Every decision, every choice." He pauses. "I just don't doubt myself." DAMON WISE

MOMMY IS OUT ON APRIL 9 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 47.



Suzanne Clément plays Diane's neighbour, Kyla.



Xavier Dolan calls the shots on *Mommy*.



Anne Dorval and Antoine-Olivier Pilon... as mother and son.

THIS MONTH IN STAR WARS



CASTING NEWS! Gareth Edwards's stand-alone *Star Wars* movie, due December 2016, is gathering pace, with Felicity Jones in talks to play the lead. Conflicting rumours have the Oscar-nominated Brit as a young Princess Leia (which we can totally see), or as Sabine Wren, a major character on the *Star Wars Rebels* TV animated series.

RETURNING! Speaking of *Star Wars Rebels*, Billy Dee Williams will follow up his cameo in *The LEGO Movie* by reprising his role as lovable rogue Lando Calrissian, in a brand-new episode of the show at the end of February. We're still waiting on word that he'll show up in *The Force Awakens*.

RUMOURED! Bothan spies indicate that – **SPOILER ALERT!** – Domhnall Gleeson's character in *The Force Awakens* may well turn out to be Luke Skywalker's offspring. The son of the son of Skywalker might not end up as a Jedi, but the commander of a Star Destroyer, playing both the Empire and the Rebel Alliance off against each other. *Yojimbo* in space!

CONFIRMED! J.J. Abrams has confirmed to US site Collider that there will be one IMAX sequence in *The Force Awakens*. "It's not a ton, but it's a good sequence. It's fun."

SPELL-CHECKED! Rian Johnson, writer-director of *Episodes VIII* and *IX*, is confident about his *Star Wars* fanboy credentials. "Just wookieepedia'd whether 'lightsaber' is one or two words," he tweeted. "So don't worry, your childhoods are in very safe hands."



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VINCE VAUGHN

The *Unfinished Business* star is so more-ishy, and he doesn't even know it

Who did you play in your first school play?

I was in the chorus. Both my parents worked, so I would always get signed up for a bunch of different activities in the summer. One of them was a local community theatre – this is where a lot of my improv came from. I was seven. You would walk into a scene and know the gist, but you would make up your own lines, and then there would be a song. The first one I joined late. I didn't have a chance to try out for anything so I joined the chorus. It was *South Pacific*. I played a sailor.

Do you do your own shopping?

I don't. I will do sometimes, I'll run out to the grocery store and grab stuff, especially on the weekends. I have two kids and my wife and we do not have a nanny, it's just the two of us.

On a scale of one to 10, how famous are you?

That's an odd thing to answer. I guess it would depend on where you are. If I'm in Los Angeles, I feel I'm pretty well-known, and I'd have to say a 10. But if I'm in the Ukraine, I might come in at a two. Who knows?

Can you play a musical instrument?

I cannot. I was talking to my friend about this, who's a very good music player, Tom Morello. He plays guitar for Rage

Against The Machine. He said he didn't know how to play an instrument until he was 17, when he started playing guitar. When I was younger, I remember my parents signing me up to learn piano, which I couldn't stand. I didn't want to play the songs they were telling me to play.

What's your nickname?

I have the obvious Double V, because my name's Vince Vaughn. Vincent D'Onofrio always called me Mr. Sunshine because I was always so positive, and I would look at things so positively. That then took off for some reason.

Jon Favreau told us you were the first one to call him Favs. Is that right?

I believe that's true. Johnny Favs.

An alien lands on Earth and asks to see a Vince Vaughn double bill. What two films do you recommend that they watch?

First of all, I would be impressed that the aliens, rather than killing everything, were interested in learning about us. The fact that they can communicate would also be inspiring. The choice of wanting to see one of my movies, I would be curious about the backstory but maybe a little afraid to ask why. I would show them *The Lost World*, only because I'm dealing with dinosaurs and it would give them the idea that I could handle

“I would be impressed that the aliens, rather than killing everything, were interested in learning about us.”



VAUGHN FACTS!

→ He went to school with Dave Eggers, author of *A Heartbreaking Work Of Staggering Genius*.

→ He lost the tip of his right thumb in a car crash.

→ He was in contention to play Chandler in *Friends*.



myself. And then I would probably want them to see *Made*. I like the movie *Made*, but my character is a little unpredictable as well, so I'd like to give them a healthy dose of respect for me.

Do people ever quote your lines back to you in the street?

I do find myself on the other end of that one quite a bit. *Swingers* I get a lot, *Old School* a lot, *Wedding Crashers*, I get a lot of that.

Have you ever punched or been tempted to punch a director?

I have never punched a director, no. It would feel like an extreme choice for me. I do a good job of being fairly direct if I'm not liking something, but I've never felt that I've run out of ideas for telling them my displeasure with the situation.

On a scale of one to 10, how hairy is your arse?

Mine is probably a one or a two. Not very hairy. I do not have a hairy ass. My ass is catered more to the English, Irish and Welsh side of my heritage.

CHRIS HEWITT

UNFINISHED BUSINESS IS OUT NOW.

GOING FOR THE KILL

Avengers beware: Joss Whedon may have a vampire-like thirst for blood...

TWELVE YEARS BEFORE HE WAS CAPTAINING A BILLION-DOLLAR FILM franchise, *Avengers: Age Of Ultron* director/writer Joss Whedon was winding down his TV series *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (stabbing him here is Michelle Trachtenberg as Buffy's sister Dawn, on set for the final ep on April 16, 2003). Now that he's likely done with The Avengers, a quote from back then may be rather telling: "I wanted to kill somebody... to do it brutally and suddenly." Watch your backs, Cap 'n' co.

The

EMPIRE

TOP 10

#160

EVIL ROBOTS

THE FILM FANATIC'S FAVOURITE LIST

1 T-1000 TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY (1991)

Realising that there was no possible way he could go beefier than Arnold Schwarzenegger's muscles'n'metal T-800 from 1984's *The Terminator*, director/writer James Cameron went in the opposite direction for the film's sequel: a lithe, lean, shapeshifting liquid metal Terminator that was the stuff of nightmares (hello, turning into a kid's stepmother and stabbing the stepfather through the throat with a sword-hand). The T-1000 may have been slightly less intimidating had Cameron gone with his first casting choice for the role: '80s rocker Billy Idol. Going so far as to draw up concept art using Idol's likeness, Cameron only settled on actor Robert Patrick after a motorcycle accident sidelined Idol. Fans of the T-1000 can look forward to more melty-killy action in this year's reboot/sequel/prequel *Terminator Genisys*.



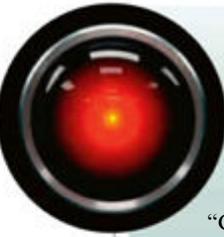
BREAKDOWN

James Jennings does The Robot and computes his choices for best bad movie robots...

To ascend to the top tier of robotic villainy, two things will help your cause: a red cyclopean eye and inventive lethal weaponry. And because we like to set arbitrary limits on our choices, the decision was made to exclude cyborgs/ androids due to their organic matter (synthetic or otherwise); so no T-800, Ash from *Alien*, Roy Batty from *Blade Runner* or Darth Vader. We're pretty sure there are bad robots in *I, Robot* too but we didn't really want to rewatch it to find out.

2 HAL 9000 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968)

With his signature creepy monotone voice (supplied by actor Douglas Rain, who director Stanley Kubrick thought had "the kind of bland mid-Atlantic accent we felt was right for the part"), the murderous AI from *2001: A Space Odyssey* is one of cinema's greatest villains. The all-seeing red lensed HAL (Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer — der) had a less than dignified fate post-film: the lens-less faceplate was found in a Paddington junk shop in 1971, along with the key to HAL's "brain room" — both items were purchased for less than a dollar. In 2010 the props were sold at a Christies auction for a more respectable \$34,350.



3 EVIL BILL & EVIL TED BILL & TED'S BOGUS JOURNEY (1991)

Originally titled *Bill & Ted Go To Hell*, the batshit insane (and excellent) sequel to *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* features robots galore: Evil Bill and Evil Ted who kill the real Bill and Ted by throwing them off a mountain (the same one seen in the *Star Trek* episode "Arena", which the dopey duo are seen watching earlier in the film) and "Good Robot Bill" and "Good Robot Ted". The latter two 'bots, for an unknown (yet excellent) reason, were played by two actors/dancers from *Breakin'* and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*: Michael 'Shrimp' Chambers and Bruno 'Pop N' Taco' Falcon.



4 EMPEROR ZURG TOY STORY 2 (1999)

Coming equipped with a laser gun that goes to a Spinal Tap-approved 11 and a very Darth Vader-esque relationship to Buzz Lightyear, Emperor Zurg (voiced by Pixar stalwart and *Finding Nemo/Wall-E* director Andrew Stanton) has a moment of redemption with his estranged son in *Toy Story 2* after a fall down an

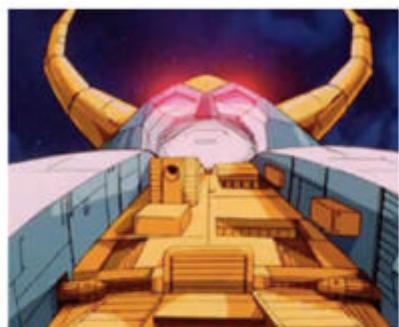
elevator shaft and subsequent bump to the head sees him more inclined to play ball rather than incinerate his offspring. His fate wasn't as rosy in the film's novelisation, where Zurg is killed by the fall and taken back to Al's Toy Barn where Buzz proceeds to bury him. Which is grim.





5 MAXIMILIAN THE BLACK HOLE (1979)

He may appear a little crude by today's standards, but the killer robot (he murders Anthony Perkins's character Durant) makes the list thanks to his badass red mono-eye (sensing a theme here?) and spinning-blade arms. In the film, Disney's most expensive at the time with a budget of \$20 million, Maximilian is the lackey of Maximilian Schell's Dr. Hans Reinhardt (the robot was named before Schell was cast). In a most excellent piece of irony (spoiler alert!), Reinhardt and Maximilian are merged once they pass through the black hole, rendering Maximillian Schell trapped inside Maximilian's shell. Ooh delicious, delicious Po-mo, Brechtian tomfoolery.



6 UNICRON TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE (1986)

Killing humans may qualify a robot as evil, but the Big Bad from the pre-Michael Bay animated movie from the '80s took it one considerable step further: he was a giant robot that changed into a planet that *ate other planets*. In a rather undignified end to his career, the character was voiced by Orson Welles, who died five days later of a heart attack after completing work on the feature length toy commercial (Orson Welles to his biographer, Barbara Leaming: "You know what I did this morning? I played the voice of a toy.") In declining health at the time, Welles's voice was so weak that audio technicians were required to run it through a synthesiser to salvage it.



7 THE GUNSLINGER WESTWORLD (1973)

A theme park gone awry thanks to a crippling power outage may have been the central conceit for his 1990 novel *Jurassic Park*, but author Michael Crichton, ripping himself off, got there first with his directorial debut *Westworld*. Yul Brynner's silent, unstoppable 'Gunslinger' is the film's proto-Terminator, with *Westworld* being the first flick to use pixelated 'android vision' (another trick *The Terminator* semi-borrowed). The film also features a damaged human face that reveals a robot underneath (James Cameron was clearly taking notes), the effect achieved by Brynner wearing oil-based make-up mixed with ground Alka-Seltzer that would fizz when 'acid' (water) was thrown on the actor's face.



8 FEMBOTS AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY (1997)

The first use of the term "fembot" appeared in a series of crossover episodes between TV's *The Bionic Woman* and *The Six Million Dollar Man* in 1976, but it's Mike Myers who put the term on the map with his breast cannon-packing minxes glimpsed in all three *Austin Powers* films (Britney Spears played one in 2002's *Austin Powers In Goldmember*). The Fembots counted a couple of Playboy Bunnies among their ranks (Cindy Margolis and Barbara Ann Moore) and one widow of a famous film director (Donna W. Scott, whose husband Tony committed suicide in 2012).



9 OMNIDROID THE INCREDIBLES (2004)

The huge spider-like 'bot that gives Bob Parr/Mr. Incredible — and later the entire Incredib-clan — a good run for his /their money in this Pixar classic sports, yes, a single red eye (note to evil robot designers — you're gonna have to try a little harder, okay?). In the film the creator of the Omnidroid, Buddy/Syndrome, is voiced by Jason Lee. There's a cheeky reference to some of Lee's other films when Mr. Incredible first meets Buddy and mistakenly calls him "Brodie": the name of Lee's character in the Kevin Smith films *Mallrats* and *Jay And Silent Bob Strike Back*.



10 ED-209 ROBOCOP (1987)

With a design based on the BELL UH-1H-HUEY choppers that were used during the Vietnam war and a voice provided by producer Jon Davison — "You have five seconds to comply" — security robot ED-209 lets audiences know they're in for a gory, gallows humoured good time with Paul Verhoeven's brutal sci-fi satire. Remarkably, ED-209's boardroom massacre was a lot worse: to avoid an X rating, Verhoeven had to tone down several scenes, including more murderous ED-209 mayhem (rendering a lot of work by veteran *Star Wars* puppet animator Phil Tippett obsolete).

AND THE WORST...

RO-MAN ROBOT MONSTER (1954)

Widely regarded as one of the worst films of all time, this low budget 3D sci-fi features the craptacular 'Ro-Man': essentially director Phil Tucker's mate in a home-made gorilla suit with a space helmet tacked on. Surely the most pissweak attempt to make a robot in the history of film.



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EMPIRE

in CINEMAS

MOVIES REVIEWED AND RATED



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LOOK CLOSER

NO.1

Kristen Stewart withdrew from the role of Jess after Will Smith's casting, citing the 21-year age difference. Margot Robbie is three months her junior.

NO.2

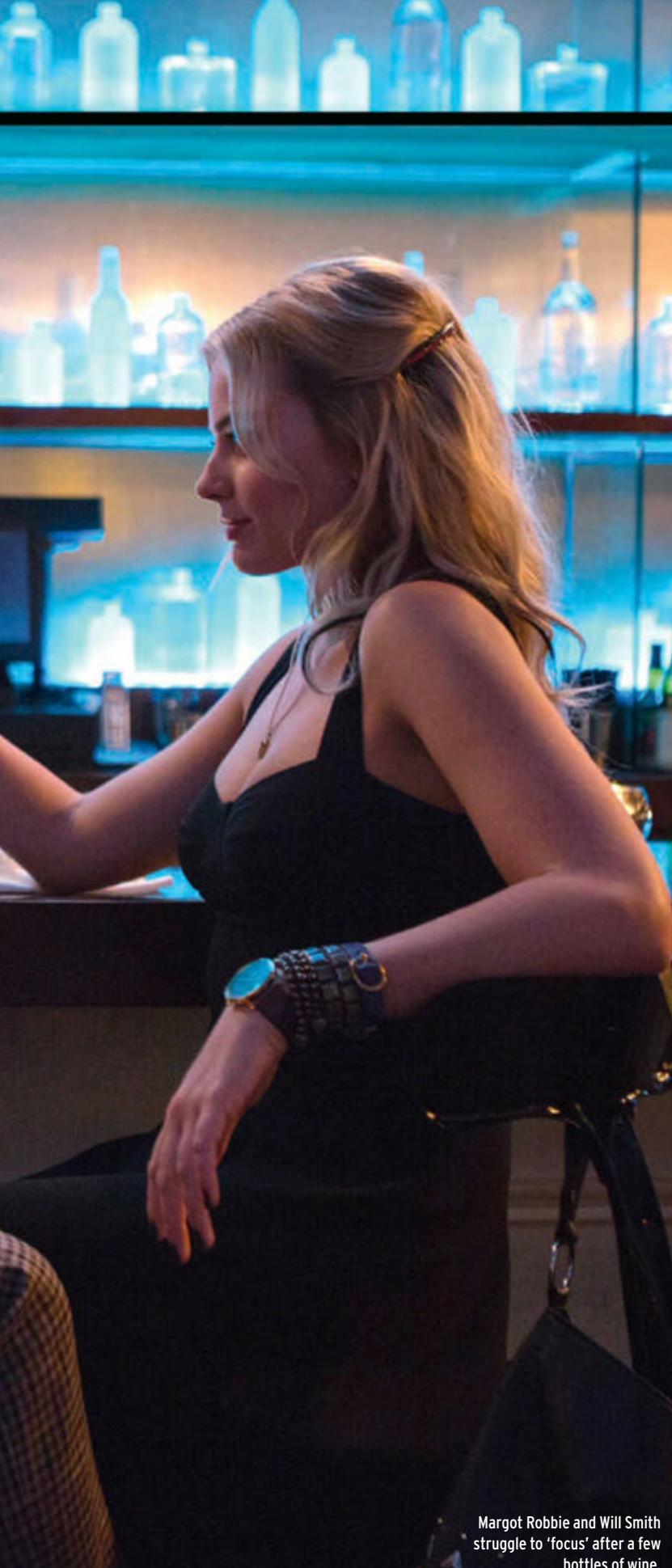
Product placement alert! Will Smith's character uses a Windows Phone handset.

NO.3

Apollo Robbins is credited as pickpocket consultant. He also trained Jennifer Garner for *Alias* – and stole her engagement ring for a joke.

NO.4

This is Smith's first con-man role since his breakthrough in *Six Degrees Of Separation* in 1993.



MARCH 9 – APRIL 19

FOCUS

Con Heir

RELEASED OUT NOW

RATED MA15+

DIRECTORS/SCREENWRITERS

Glenn Ficarra, John Requa

CAST Will Smith, Margot Robbie, Gerald McRaney, BD Wong, Rodrigo Santoro

RUNNING TIME 105 minutes

PLOT Veteran conman Nicky (Smith) takes rookie pickpocket Jess (Robbie) under his wing, training her in the ways of larceny. But when they separately become involved in a major racing scam, one misstep from either could spell disaster.

formula with nifty sleight-of-hand. The opening set-piece starts with the pair meeting in conventional romcom style, and ends as something much sneakier, as Nicky and Jess put their cards on the table and recognise each other as kindred spirits. There's a wonderful 'ta-dah!' moment over brunch in a café as the scale of Nicky's operation is revealed. In one standout sequence we track a villainous henchman as he goes about his business, killing time until he ambushes our heroes.

The problem is that overall, the movie is just too light. Gliding smoothly from one situation to the next, Nicky is a character for whom everything comes effortlessly – as a gruff, foul-mouthed enforcer snapping at his heels, Gerald McRaney displays more personality in one scene than Smith is allowed during his entire screentime. He's a cypher: a fun companion for the ride, but difficult to root for when the guano hits the fan in the third act. Jess is more interesting, but it's one of those films that's only as gripping as the bit of plot-twistiness that's going on at any given time.

As this exchange implies, the latest entry in the category of film that is *cinéma du swindle* is a rather over-familiar confection. But at least it's rarely as generic as its first-base title, and while the route it takes is one that's been travelled cinematically many times before, it has enough dazzle along the way to make it worth a watch.

Smith and Robbie slip easily into their roles. Frequently cast as an authority figure, most recently in the joyless *After Earth*, Smith revels in the opportunity to play super-slick hustler Nicky. And Robbie gives as good as she gets, marvellously gutsy as pickpocket Jess. Part romantic comedy, part Jedi/padawan training drama, *Focus* is a fine showcase for their chemistry – and no doubt the reason they'll be reunited in next year's *Suicide Squad*.

Writer-directors Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, the minds behind *Crazy Stupid Love*, manage for the most part to freshen up the

Speaking of which, the highlight is a 10-minute sequence at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans. So self-contained it could work as a short film, it guest-stars BD Wong as a giggling, filthy-'tached billionaire who challenges Nicky to a high-stakes bet, and quickly spirals into a hugely suspenseful, assured piece of cinema. It's at this point that *Focus* flies. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT
Hitch meets *The Sting*. This is maximum-gloss entertainment with its fair share of tricksy rug-pulls. But, like one of the neon-coloured cocktails Smith drinks in it, it's more of an immediate rush than something you'll remember in a year.

★★★★★

THE EMPIRE MOVIE GUIDE: UNMISSABLE ★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★ GOOD ★★ POOR ★★ TRAGIC ★

IN CINEMAS

MANNY LEWIS

All you need is laugh

RELEASED MARCH 12

RATED TBC

DIRECTOR Anthony Mir

SCREENWRITERS Anthony Mir, Carl Barron

CAST Carl Barron, Leeanna Walsman, Roy Billing, Damien Garvey

RUNNING TIME 90 minutes

PLOT Despite an ability to enrapture crowds of strangers, popular stand-up comic Manny Lewis (Barron) lives a lonely life away from the stage. A chance meeting with kindred spirit Maria (Walsman) leads to a shot at love that could unravel at any moment due to secrets kept...

"HAVE YOU EVER LAID IN BED REALLY still and pretended you were dead?" asks comedian Manny Lewis (Carl Barron) to an audience who respond with peals of laughter as we're treated to shots of Lewis backstage, alone and forlorn.

Lest it seem we're in for the old, hoary cliché of the 'sad clown', it doesn't take long before a couple of things become apparent: the sad/funny dichotomy is an overly simplistic one that the filmmakers clearly wish to subvert and Barron, as his legion of fans will attest, is a genuinely very funny guy.

The film's main thrust involves Manny's attempts to connect with people away from the stage: namely his distant, curmudgeonly father Lyle (Roy Billing) and phone sex operator / potential love interest Maria (Leeanna Walsman).

Although ostensibly playing a version of himself, the film gets by on Barron's dry humour and wounded puppy charm: there's an awkward meet-cute in a cafe where Lewis ruins the ending of a Hermann Hesse novel for the bemused Maria; later he's giving himself a pre-date pep talk in the



TRAILER TIME!

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"See I'm a stand-UP, but I'm sitting DOWN! Geddit?"

mirror and dancing around in his undies and socks to The Smith's *This Charming Man*.

It's to Barron and Walsman's credit that the plot's credibility straining main conceit – that Manny calls and confesses details of he and Maria's relationship to phone sex operator 'Caroline' (Maria under a pseudonym) while remaining oblivious – ceases to be a problem thanks to the pair's likeability. There's a sweetness to their interplay that papers over any cracks, even when the film flits with romcom cliché in the third act.

Director/co-writer Antony Mir does a sterling job of capturing Sydney at its most luminescent: the film switches between the grandness of the Harbour and a neon King's Cross, lit up with shaggy character. It's this ability to toggle between being larger than life and intimately relatable that gives the film – and Barron himself – a winning heart. **JAMES JENNINGS**

VERDICT

Manny Lewis overcomes familiar romcom tropes with heart, laughs and lashings of sweetness with Barron ably transferring his charm to the big screen. ★★★★



INFINITELY POLAR BEAR

RELEASED MARCH 26 RATED M DIRECTOR Maya Forbes CAST Mark Ruffalo, Zoe Saldana, Keir Dullea

IT FEELS STRANGE TO CALL A FILM ABOUT A MANIC-depressive man raising his daughters virtually alone "cute" but that's what this is. A wonderfully expressive Ruffalo is superb as Cameron, a perfectly imperfect father who puts the fun in dysfunction but also the ass in embarrassment. First-timers Imogene Wolodarsky and Ashley Aufderheide deliver performances wise beyond their years as his exasperated but adoring daughters. *Infinitely Polar Bear* (bipolar bear, geddit?) is an endearing film occasionally guilty of being too light-handed. No, kids, manic depression isn't always this eccentrically enjoyable.

ELIZABETH BEST ★★★★★



KIDNAPPING MR. HEINEKEN

RELEASED MARCH 12 RATED M DIRECTOR Daniel Alfredson CAST Anthony Hopkins, Sam Worthington

YOU MIGHT ASSUME FROM THE BROAD AUSTRALIAN and British accents peppering this true-crime caper that young, loutish backpackers famously kidnapped beer baron Freddy Heineken (Hopkins) in Amsterdam in 1983 for a record sum (35 million Dutch guilders, the equivalent to about AU\$25 million). It's a jarring choice by Alfredson (the original *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*) for a story so inherently Dutch. More dismaying, even for those that know the bumbling outcome, is that there's barely a crackle of tension, though Hopkins does inject some Lector-esque scene chewing.

JIM MITCHELL ★★★★★

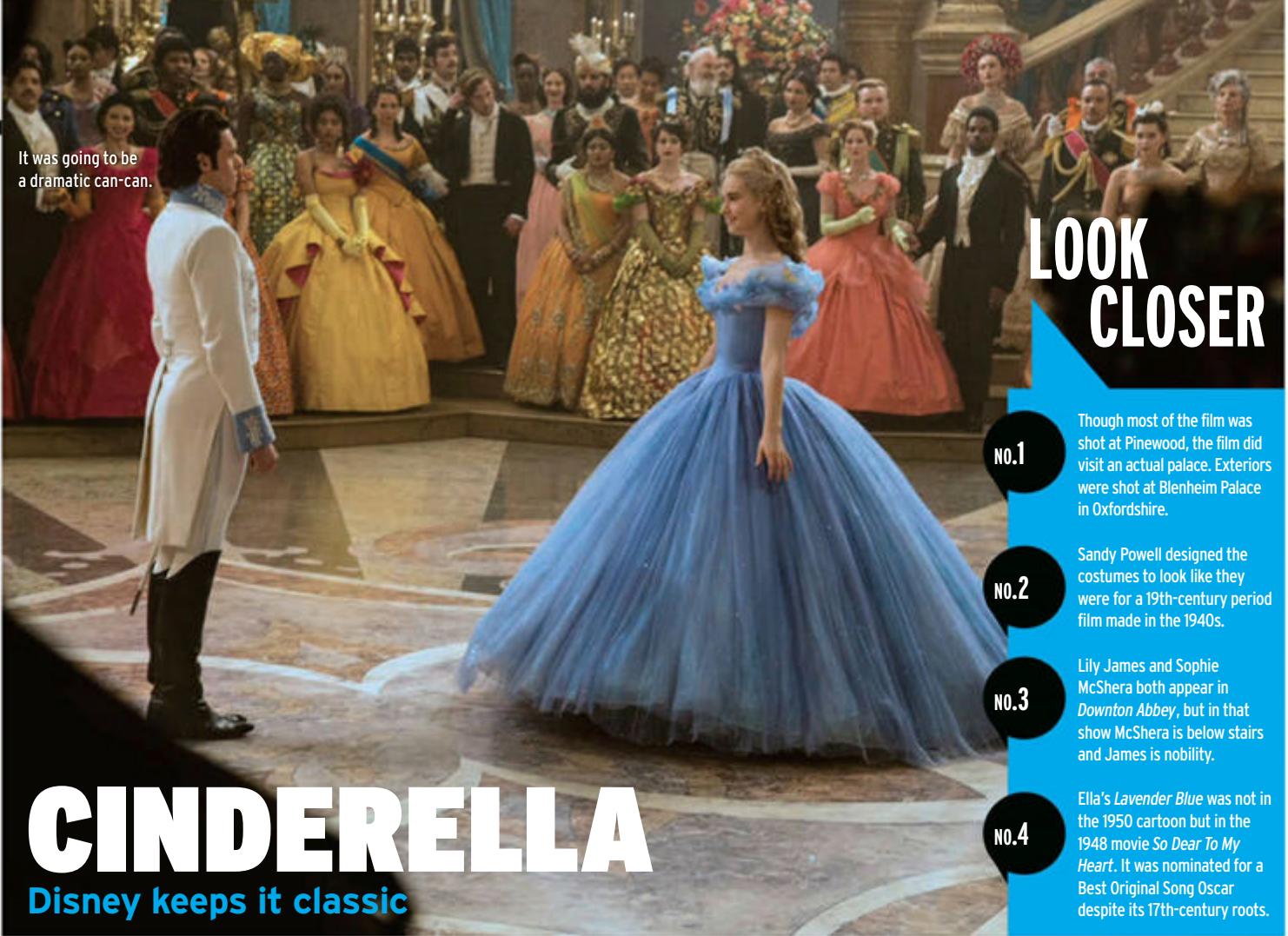


LUCKY THEM

RELEASED OUT NOW RATED M DIRECTOR Megan Griffiths CAST Toni Collette, Thomas Haden Church

LOOSELY BASED ON THE LIFE OF CO-WRITER AND actress Emily Wachtel, Toni Collette plays Ellie Klug (Wachtel's then writing pseudonym), a veteran rock journo with a wandering eye for the young rockers of Seattle. Assigned to hunt down her rock star ex on the 10th anniversary of his disappearance, she teams up with Thomas Haden Church's eccentric doco maker to see if the singer has played his great gig in the sky or gone into hiding. Despite setting itself in the grunge capital (Klug has two fish called Kurt and Courtney), the rock 'n' road movie never rises above easy listening. It's a quirky US indie by numbers, saved by the two leads.

DAVID MICHAEL BROWN ★★★★★



LOOK CLOSER

NO.1

Though most of the film was shot at Pinewood, the film did visit an actual palace. Exteriors were shot at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire.

NO.2

Sandy Powell designed the costumes to look like they were for a 19th-century period film made in the 1940s.

NO.3

Lily James and Sophie McShera both appear in *Downton Abbey*, but in that show McShera is below stairs and James is nobility.

NO.4

Ella's *Lavender Blue* was not in the 1950 cartoon but in the 1948 movie *So Dear To My Heart*. It was nominated for a Best Original Song Oscar despite its 17th-century roots.

CINDERELLA

Disney keeps it classic

RELEASED MARCH 26

RATED TBC

DIRECTOR Kenneth Branagh

SCREENWRITER Chris Weitz

CAST Cate Blanchett, Richard Madden, Lily James, Helena Bonham Carter

RUNNING TIME TBC

PLOT You know this by now. An orphaned girl (James) is kept as a servant by her wicked stepmother (Blanchett) but shown a way out by a prince (Madden) and a fairy godmother (Bonham Carter).

THIS LIVE-ACTION TAKE ON CINDERELLA, which sticks closely to the Disney animation, is primarily for those who found *Frozen* a bit radical. It's for those who like a fairytale where men are men (riding horses, bearing swords, wearing britches so snug they may imperil their paternal prospects) and every woman is an aspiring princess. Progressive it's not, but as a traditional tale it is well told and beautifully presented. Its lack of knowing nudges is almost radical.

In Kenneth Branagh Disney has found reliable hands, a director

who can keep a story briskly trotting along and all the style in service to the content. He also has a sharp sense of humour and knows that if the setting is absurd, you don't have to lean too hard on line delivery for the joke to land. Where similar films like *Mirror Mirror* and *Maleficent* have strained so hard for camp the effort killed them, Branagh recognises the story is camp by nature and doesn't need further winking. Which isn't to say for a second this is subtle.

There are a lot of 'turns' in *Cinderella*. You can see the bite marks in the scenery, but the largely British cast nibble rather than gnaw. Holliday Grainger and Sophie McShera are despicable fun as the cruel stepsisters, looking like the *Shining* twins rolled through Barbara Cartland's knicker drawer. Helena Bonham Carter does her energetic Tim Burton pantomiming but with sparkling lightness instead of swivel-eyed darkness. Hayley Atwell has a good old faint before popping off as Cinderella's much-missed mother.

They're at the tipping point of going over the top, and the film is better for it.

The main event, obviously, is Blanchett's devious stepmother. She isn't just given a big entrance, she's given a big entrance for every scene (there's one shot where she simply opens a door, but contorts herself into an arch that should require pulleys). Branagh has apparently rifled through every female star of the golden age and grafted the best to Blanchett. She's Rita Hayworth yucking it up with the boys. She's Marlene Dietrich glaring out of the shadows. She's Vivien Leigh smouldering from under outsized hats. She is also one of the characters for whom Branagh and screenwriter Chris Weitz have tried to find some depth. We get a monologue about why she's become so calloused and see her face harden at every mention of Ella's mother. That, thankfully, doesn't mean we're meant to sympathise with her. She's still dreadful, but dreadful with purpose.

All this noise and gesticulation

makes it tough for Lily James and Richard Madden, as Ella and the Prince, to create an impression.

Theirs are the least dazzling roles – Cinderella's arc is largely a makeover bookended by washing up – but they are endearing in their eternal optimism rather than tooth-rottingly sweet. The one nod to modernity is in making the mantra of "have courage and be kind" applicable to both leads. Most Disney fairytales would not have a scene of the prince curled up, crying next to his dying father – a touching, smart surprise.

This is the Disney princess model of old with some new technology, but that's a formula which built a studio. If the gender politics don't make you grind your teeth then the light humour and sparkling visuals should keep you happy, if not ever after, at least for the running time. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT
A retrograde fantasy with the depth of a dressing-up box, but it's spirited, genuinely funny and played to the hilt by an excellent cast. ★★★★☆

IN CINEMAS

Magic Muttley.



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JUPITER ASCENDING

2015: A Space Oddity

RELEASED OUT NOW

RATED M

DIRECTORS/SCREENWRITERS Andy

Wachowski, Lana Wachowski

CAST Mila Kunis, Channing Tatum,

Eddie Redmayne

RUNNING TIME 127 minutes

PLOT Jupiter Jones (Kunis) is identified as the genetic match of a murdered alien matriarch who used to own Earth. Human-wolf warrior Caine Wise (Tatum) shows up to protect her from alien assassins and take her to outer space.

THE WACHOWSKIS' 1999 *THE MATRIX*

brought cyberpunk to the screen only 15 years after it had peaked in science fiction literature. With *Jupiter Ascending*, they revert to the default of big-screen sci-fi by using an array of awe-inspiring, cutting-edge special effects to deliver concepts pulp magazines had outgrown by 1935.

Like John Carter and Flash Gordon, heroine Jupiter Jones (Mila Kunis) is whisked from a dull Earth populated by comedy

Russians to faraway planets run like Arabian nights fantasy kingdoms. Decadent sibling tyrants are played as exquisitely camp by respectable British actors who relish in raised eyebrows, and model a succession of outfits which make the cast of *The Fifth Element* look drab. Despite competition from molten-eyed Douglas Booth and Tuppence Middleton bathing in a tub of human goo, Eddie Redmayne wins as the most thinly sliced outer-space ham since Max

von Sydow's Ming The Merciless, even managing to make ponderous, thudding dialogue sound elegant.

After so many Luke-Harry-Frodo heroes' journey franchises, it should be a bold stroke to make the Chosen One a princess, but Kunis's Jupiter is so wet and trusting, she needs Channing Tatum's huffy hero to rescue her from certain death every six minutes. The ridiculous love story is sadly more amusing than bizarre attempts at Terry Gilliam-Douglas Adams-style sci-fi comedy. Action set-pieces follow *The Matrix* sequel tradition of falling unscathed through miles of CGI explosions, though the early skirmishes are at least exciting. **KIM NEWMAN**

VERDICT

Like too much filmed space opera, this is wonderfully imaginative when it comes to costume, art direction, special effects, spaceships and incidental alien creatures but stuck with old-hat character types and a resolutely unspecial storyline. It's frequently entertaining, but as much for its terrible moments as its inspired touches. ★★★★

THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL

Twice a charm

RELEASED OUT NOW

RATED PG

DIRECTOR John Madden

SCREENWRITER OI Parker

CAST Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Dev Patel, Bill Nighy, Richard Gere

RUNNING TIME 122 minutes

PLOT Having established his ramshackle retirement hotel in Jaipur, India, budding entrepreneur Sonny (Patel) dreams of starting a chain with his acerbic mentor, Muriel (Smith).

apparent guilelessness is to the great credit, though, of a film which is kind, sweet and, yes, very open-hearted.

It's a rare thing indeed: a follow-up that feels less cynical than the original, which rinsed the grey dollar with an adept but calculating tale of pensioners pining for life before death. Director John Madden returns with writer OI Parker and though there are some over-familiar elements – a story strand strongly reminiscent of a *Fawlty Towers* episode – the pair do a remarkable job of weaving multiple characters and subplots into a cohesive, satisfying whole, giving everyone



Brett Lee's 18th Bollywood role.

their moment. The first film hinged on Evelyn (Judi Dench), and her will-they, won't-they relationship with Douglas (Bill Nighy) stretches out here, probably as far as it could go without audience members actually screaming, "JUST BLOODY KISS HER!"

Of the additions to the cast the most eye-catching is Richard Gere, but the performance of the picture is from Maggie Smith. Sharp-tongued and reluctantly kind, her character is not – one imagines – all that different from the actress

herself, but in her openness and honesty in confronting twilight, she inspires as a woman looking for our own glimpse of the sun. Too late for Oscar this year, she should be remembered next, for this: The VERY Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. **NEV PIERCE**

VERDICT
An entirely charming extension of the most unlikely franchise, gently handling big themes and dissolving cynicism with laughter. Maggie Smith is superb.

★★★★

THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD Hotel? A sequel with a title like that isn't just asking for trouble, it is giving critics knives and presenting its exposed heart for butchery. This



"See how the cook flips those burgers, flips 'em for real?"

LOOK CLOSER

NO.1

Bigfoot mentions a character called Fatso Judson. The name references Ernest Borgnine's character in *From Here To Eternity*.

NO.2

The TV show Doc watches on TV is an actual police drama called *Adam-12*, following two cops on patrol in LA.

NO.3

The film playing in the movie theatre at Chrysoklydon is *Red Nightmare*, an army information film from 1952.

NO.4

Josh Brolin says reclusive author Pynchon is in the film. If you spot him, we'll give you a fiver.

INHERENT VICE

L.A. Unconventional

RELEASED MARCH 12

RATED MA15+

DIRECTOR Paul Thomas Anderson

CAST Joaquin Phoenix, Josh Brolin, Katherine Waterston, Reese Witherspoon, Owen Wilson

RUNNING TIME 149 minutes

PLOT Los Angeles, 1970, and under the sway of his ex, Shasta (Waterston), private eye Doc Sportello (Phoenix) goes in search of her new lover, a recently vanished tycoon, and literally stumbles into a nutty conspiracy involving corrupt cops, heroin smugglers, snitches, DAs, dentists and a mysterious organisation named The Golden Fang.

HOW DO YOU REVIEW A FILM THAT'S deliberately half-crazed? One where plot logic is smothered in psychedelic smog, mostly care of private eye Larry 'Doc' Sportello's prodigious dope habit?

For his seventh film, Paul Thomas Anderson has elected to adapt American writer Thomas Pynchon's seventh novel. None of the reclusive novelist's dizzying tales have ever been adapted

before. Pynchon works to the principle that the less a reader is able to grasp, the better. His grand preoccupation is his country's spiritual welfare, depicting America as one giant, ever-unfolding conspiracy. Anderson keeps faith with his idol's mystifying visions.

Inherent Vice stoops across the border between the freewheeling Californian '60s and the uptight Nixonian '70s. Symbolically, it opens with the ocean of time lapping at fictional LA outlier Gordita Beach. And, of course, with a girl: Shasta Fay Hepworth (the divinely ethereal Katherine Waterston), Doc's old flame, who has a case for him. Can he locate her missing boyfriend, a big-time real-estate type, name of Michael Z. Wolfmann, played by Eric Roberts? And so Doc 'trips' into the rabbit hole. An impenetrable investigation given a sweet, sing-songy narration by a local astrologer named Sortilège (Joanna Newsom).

Doc is a lovably dotty creation, a Fabulous Furry Freak Brother

squeezed into Philip Marlowe, at once befuddled and cunning. He's barbed wire masquerading as a ball of wool. With mutton chops the size of bat wings, frowzy hair attempting a 'fro, and wide, sorrowful eyes, Joaquin Phoenix brings an air of melancholy and bitterness to Doc's soulful groove.

Beginning at the Chick Planet massage parlour – Pussy Eater Special \$14.95! – it translates as a string of increasingly wonky encounters, which only serve to make the case (and film) more incoherent. We'll meet nose-picking FBI agents, missing surf-saxophonists (a draggy Owen Wilson), randy DAs (a perky Reese Witherspoon) and wheedling, coke-snorting Doctor Rudy Blatnoid (a gleefully letchy Martin Short) with fingers in more than his clients' mouths. Never more than a breath away from Doc's meanderings is Josh Brolin's splendidly odious, fascist-cropped Lt. Det. 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen, administering educational dead legs to the "goddam hippy". They are kind of co-dependent.

Ultimately, the plot will hinge on the question of who, where, when and what is The Golden Fang? Possible answers to which include a boat, a band, a real estate dealership, a cabal of heroin smugglers, an Aryan biker gang, a syndicate of tax-dodging dentists or a new rehab joint-cum-boobyhatch. The correct answer: all of the above. You dig?

This is noir at its most playful, the work of a major American filmmaker, repelling categorisation and messing with our heads. A second viewing is heartily recommended. We're pretty confident it does add up. Not that it really matters. In the end, this is just a movie about a guy who has lost a girl. You dig? **IAN NATHAN**

VERDICT
Take it from us – ignorance is bliss. The less you try to figure out Anderson's rambling, mesmerising mystery, the better. Just relax and let this beautiful, haunting, hilarious, chaotic, irritating and possibly profound tragicomedy wash over you. There is nothing else out there like it.

★★★★★

'71

Brutal brilliance

RELEASED MARCH 19

CERTIFICATE MA15+

DIRECTOR Yann Demange

SCREENWRITER Gregory Burke

CAST Jack O'Connell, Sean Harris,

Kilian Scott, Martin McCann, Sam Reid

RUNNING TIME 99 minutes

PLOT Despatched to Belfast, grunt Gary Hook (O'Connell) is stranded on a hostile estate when his patrol goes badly wrong. Can he make it back to the barracks before being found by the IRA?

"TAKE IT AND GIVE IT BACK" IS THE shout in the boxing match that opens this strikingly accomplished first feature from director Yann Demange and screenwriter Gregory Burke. It could serve ably as both précis of – and motto for – the combustible situation these young soldiers are about to ignorantly walk into: Belfast, 1971. A city divided largely along

Protestant and Catholic lines – the Loyalists who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK, and the Republicans who want it to join Eire – Belfast is a kitchen-sink war zone.

This is a tribal situation the British Army are portrayed as blundering into, with elements both nefarious and naive. While a unit of undercover soldiers (lead by Sean Harris) are clearly up to some Bad Shit, the regular army is dodging it on the street – literally, as locals fling faeces at the unwelcome "Brits". More bewildered than he is belligerent, Jack O'Connell's young private is our avatar, left behind thanks to the panic of his inexperienced commanding officer (Sam Reid).

Wounded and scared and largely silent, O'Connell struggles through the streets in a performance that's wonderfully



TRAILER TIME!

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It was first in, first served at the rifle range.

watchable. Here he holds the screen with no swagger – just a simple desire to survive. As a knife-wielding hero, he's less like Sylvester Stallone in *Rambo* than he is Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween*. The John Carpenter touches extend to David Holmes's judiciously used score, plus the sense '71 is, like *Assault On Precinct 13*, an urban Western. This points to an element some might find uncomfortable: '71 is, in some ways, a popcorn thriller about a community in tragedy. But however exciting the set-pieces, the film retains its integrity.

The violence is seen, shockingly, and felt – from bomb to blade. Demange's direction puts you right there and, while Burke's script isn't given to political grandstanding, its glancing blows have a lasting impact. '71 is one of the best films of the year thus far.

NEV PIERCE

VERDICT
The villainy is, perhaps unavoidably, somewhat signposted, but this is a tense, gripping thriller that combines real-world relevance with high-concept entertainment. In a superb ensemble, O'Connell is outstanding. ★★★★

LOVE IS STRANGE

A couple retreats

RELEASED MARCH 19

CERTIFICATE M

DIRECTOR Ira Sachs

SCREENWRITERS Ira Sachs, Mauricio Zacharias

CAST John Lithgow, Alfred Molina, Marisa Tomei, Charlie Tahan

RUNNING TIME 94 minutes

PLOT After 40 years together, newlyweds Ben (Lithgow) and George (Molina) are left homeless, forced to seek help from their nearest and not always dearest. Separated, Ben goes into decline, while George desperately tries to put their life back together.

WHEN IT COMES TO ON-SCREEN chemistry it's unlikely any other star pairing of the year will top the absolute deliciousness of troupers John Lithgow and Alfred Molina, so at ease together in this bittersweet treat on relationships – lovers, family, friendships.

When cultured, witty Ben (Lithgow) and George (Molina) are finally able to legally wed, the occasion is an especially happy day shared with an affectionate circle of family and friends. But music teacher George is fired from his Catholic school when the fanfare around the nuptials proves too far-out for the bishop. Ben, an aged, ailing artist, isn't earning, and their complicated co-op arrangements and investments fail them, so they are out on the street.

No matter how much you love someone, having them in your space is testing. Chatty Ben is soon driving his novelist niece (Marisa Tomei) wild, while secretive teen Joey (Charlie Tahan) bewails his loss of privacy and meanly vents his resentments. More amusingly, George is crashing on the couch of exuberant gay cops (Cheyenne Jackson and Manny Perez) whose



Years later, the search for Harry tirelessly continued.

all-night parties do wonders for our image of the NYPD but take their toll on the job-seeking, apartment-hunting guest.

Lithgow shows remarkable restraint in a gentle performance that is as much about feeling old, lonely and helpless as it is about relationships. In the deceptively simplest scenes, Molina beautifully conveys a rich inner life. Ira Sachs and co-writer Mauricio Zacharias haven't done anything flashy, but the dialogue and behaviour of the

different generations are so well observed and the direction focussed so gracefully on eloquent moments, that the cumulative effect is profoundly moving. The conclusion is that love, joyous, demanding or painful, isn't at all strange. It simply is. ANGIE ERRIGO

VERDICT
Elevated from nice to beautifully memorable by wonderful performances and thoughtful direction of perfect small moments. ★★★★

X+Y

Equals Rad

RELEASED APRIL 9

RATED M

DIRECTOR Morgan Matthews

CAST Asa Butterfield, Rafe Spall, Sally Hawkins, Eddie Marsan

PLOT A young autistic genius who struggles to connect with people but finds comfort in numbers is thrust out of his comfort zone when he is encouraged to join the world of competitive maths.

IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE NOT A numbers person; this is a movie about mathematics that's less about the figures and more about the complicated and ever-unsolvable equations surrounding human interaction.

Diagnosed as "on the spectrum" as a child, Nathan (an astute and nuanced Asa Butterfield) forms a close bond with his father, a man with infinite patience and understanding for his son's

condition. After dad dies, Nathan struggles to apply the formulaic logic he knows into interpreting emotions, locking his beleaguered mother (Sally Hawkins) out with a simple "you're not smart enough". But when his tutor, Mr. Humphreys (Rafe Spall) encourages him to enter an international maths competition, Nathan is forced to come out of his shell as he wings his way around the world and away from his familiar safety nets.

There's a connection that director Morgan Matthews has with his characters that immediately outs him as a documentarian (he directed *Beautiful Young Minds*, a 2007 doco on similar subject matter). He gets these people and is wonderfully adept at passing on this deep understanding. The movie's main strength lies within this empathy, and its ability to



explore the inner workings of multiple characters – not just the protagonists – without it feeling jumbled or complicated.

There's also a grounded sincerity in the performances that helps make *X+Y* so compelling. Spall is heartbreakingly charismatic as the gruff tutor, a former mathlete who suffers from multiple sclerosis and finds a kindred spirit in Nathan. "Why can't you walk properly?" Nathan asks him. "Well that's blunt," Humphreys retorts. "Why are you weird?" Similarly Hawkins is achingly real as a mother

desperate to connect with a son whose condition requires endless effort with little return.

"If beauty is truth," one of Nathan's mentors explains to him. "And truth beauty, then surely mathematics is the most beautiful thing of all."

Indeed, *X+Y* is beautiful in its unflinching honesty.

ELIZABETH BEST

VERDICT

Empathy, plus powerful performances, multiplied by an eye for detail make for a film that's equal parts charming and captivating. ★★★★☆



THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ELEANOR RIGBY: THEM

RELEASED MARCH 12 RATED M

DIRECTOR Ned Benson CAST Jessica Chastain, James McAvoy, Viola Davis

WRITER-DIRECTOR NED BENSON'S debut was made in two whole parts – *Him* and *Her*. These stand-alone movies revolve around the same fractured marriage, told from the perspective of either Conor (McAvoy), or Eleanor (Chastain). Giving in to commercial orthodoxy, *Them* compiles *Him* and *Her* into one opportunity for us to observe from an outsider's perspective. The result is quietly affecting and commendably credible, without pandering to glib mechanics.

BEN MCEACHERN ★★★★☆



DIOR AND I

RELEASED MARCH 26 RATED M

DIRECTOR Frédéric Tcheng CAST Raf Simons, Pieter Mulier, Sharon Stone, Jennifer Lawrence

CONCERNED MORE WITH THE challenges of design rather than the more sensationalistic aspects of the fashion industry, Frederic Tcheng's fly-on-the-wall, behind-the-scenes documentary profile of legendary French fashion house Christian Dior proves more compelling when focusing on long-serving staff and their skills and opinions, rather than incoming artistic director Raf Simons and the pressure he faces creating his debut haute couture collection in spring 2012.

DAVID PARKINSON ★★★★★



EASTERN BOYS

RELEASED OUT NOW RATED TBC

DIRECTOR Robin Campillo CAST Olivier Rabourdin, Kirill Emelyanov, Danil Vorobyev, Edéa Darcque

THIS FRENCH DRAMA FILM WRITTEN AND directed by Robin Campillo (*Les Revenants, The Class*) is an alternately raw and sensitive study of deception and protective love as naive Parisian businessman Daniel (Olivier Rabourdin) befriends young, vulnerable Ukrainian hustler Marek (Kirill Emelyanov) and risks the ire of his ruthless gang boss. If the denouement feels a tad contrived, this still remains a tense and often tender study of middle-aged lust becoming something more meaningful.

DP ★★★★☆



LEVIATHAN

RELEASED MARCH 26 RATED M

DIRECTOR Andrey Zvyagintsev CAST Aleksey Serebryakov, Elena Lyadova

UNTIL A JOB BIOPIC IS GREENLIT – NEXT Thursday, at the current rate of Bible adaptations – Andrey Zvyagintsev's modern parable of a working man crushed beneath the wheels of the Russian state is a spellbinding alternative. Long takes languidly capture the solemn beauty of the Russian landscape, but it's the slow crumpling of Nikolai (Serebryakov), as church, government and judiciary gang up to rob him of his most prized possession, that will leave a longer, angrier impression. Not appearing on Putin's DVD shelf anytime soon. PHIL DE SEMLYEN ★★★★★

IN CINEMAS

Framed.



BIG EYES

Jeepers peepers

RELEASED MARCH 19

RATED M

DIRECTOR Tim Burton

CAST Amy Adams, Christoph Waltz, Danny Huston, Terence Stamp, Jason Schwartzman

RUNNING TIME 106 minutes

PLOT Escaping a failing marriage, wannabe artist Margaret Ulrich (Adams) moves to San Francisco. Everything looks good when she meets and marries fellow artist Walter Keane (Waltz) and her paintings begin to sell. Still, as Margaret's portraits of wide-eyed waifs become more popular, Walter unashamedly takes credit for her artwork.

BIG EYES, TIM BURTON'S 17TH FILM AS A director, doesn't fit into the pervading and possibly unfair caricature of his recent work. You know the one: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, oddball outsider, white make-up, off-kilter camera angles, Gothic trappings, Danny Elfman tunes... Visually his sunniest film since *Big Fish*, *Big Eyes* is part art history biopic, part portrait of a sadistic marriage and

part '50s period drama. In scale and feel, within Burton's output, it is probably closest to *Ed Wood* but it doesn't deliver similar degrees of flavour and insight.

It's easy to see why Burton was attracted to the story of Margaret Keane (Amy Adams), the painter of saucer-eyed waifs that became hugely popular in the '50s. Both artists have the ability to mine the tender from the grotesque, turning a brand built on spooky kitsch into mainstream success, often to the befuddlement of critics. What feels a stretch for the director is the heart of the movie; Margaret's difficult marriage to wannabe artist Walter Keane (Christoph Waltz), who took all the credit for his wife's work.

Screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski specialise in off-the-wall biopics (from *Ed Wood* to *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* and *Man On The Moon*), but they can't mine the complexity and sadness. A family life where a mother lies to her daughter seems ripe for riveting drama but here veers wildly from broad comedy to

slasher horror. The film also never finds a way to dramatise the source of Margaret's creativity, be it visually or verbally ("The eyes are the windows to the soul" is about as good as it gets). There is little sense of why she ostensibly paints the same debatably banal portrait over and over again.

Adams provides a sympathetic core to the movie, selling the idea that Margaret would go along with Walter's fraud while believably conveying the character's conviction when enough is enough. A showman and entrepreneur, Walter has an in-built capacity for loquacious language and the dramatic flourish. To start with, Waltz's teeth-and-tics flamboyance entertains, but it soon begins to suffocate the whole picture, reaching nuclear levels when Walter decides to cross-examine himself in a court case. *Big Eyes* never reconciles the tone between Adams's gentle, studied delivery and Waltz's outlandishness, and the depiction of a controlling, exploitative relationship subsequently rings false.

LOOK CLOSER

Look out for the real Margaret Keane sitting on a park bench.

NO.1 Burton has commissioned Keane portraits of his ex-girlfriend Lisa Marie and wife Helena Bonham Carter.

NO.2 Joan Crawford, portrayed in the movie, put two Keane paintings in *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?* and used her portrait on the cover of her autobiography.

NO.3 Keep 'em peeled for Krysten Ritter as Margaret's only friend, DeeAnn. Ritter will play Marvel superhero-turned-detective Jessica Jones in the Netflix TV series.

The big showdown sees Margaret and Walter forced to produce duelling paintings in court to prove authorship. It's a bizarre idea you feel must have been a prime driver in Burton taking on the project, but he delivers a potentially great moment in the most pedestrian way.

There are intermittent flashes of Burton's personality: The pastel houses recall the suburbia of *Edward Scissorhands*, a close-up of Walter looking through a keyhole is creepy and, most strikingly, a scene in which Margaret sees supermarket shoppers with pumped-up pupils. But, while it is technically proficient, this is strangely anonymous filmmaking. Surely a Tim Burton film should never have a montage to a Lana Del Rey song? **IAN FREER**

VERDICT
Tim Burton's return to real-life storytelling is entertaining but flawed. See it for a fascinating true story and a fantastic Amy Adams. Beware the uneven tone, a lack of depth and Christoph Waltz's monumental mugging. ★★★★☆

MOMMY

Problem Child

RELEASED APRIL 9

RATED TBC

DIRECTOR/SCREENWRITER

Xavier Dolan

CAST Anne Dorval, Antoine-Olivier Pilon, Suzanne Clément

RUNNING TIME 139 minutes

PLOT Die (Dorval), a feisty, widowed single mother, is forced to take care of her troubled son Steve (Pilon) after he is ejected from a state care facility. Things look up when introverted neighbour Kyla (Clément) starts to home-school the youngster.

IF YOU ARE BEMOANING THE LACK OF great lead performances by women, look no further than *Mommy*. Canadian director Xavier Dolan's film is built on not one but two stellar turns from Anne Dorval and Suzanne Clément that blow any of this year's nominations out of the water. Along with the teenage Antoine-Olivier Pilon, they deliver 139 minutes of blistering



TRAILER ME!

Scan the page with **viewa** to watch previews for all the films on this spread.

"We should probably bury the clothes we're wearing, too."

drama that is funny, tragic and electric.

The high-pitched fervour is set from the get-go. On her way to pick up her troubled teenage son from a care facility, single mum Die gets into a car crash, and a blazing row. From then on, Dolan mounts unpredictable scene after unpredictable scene that skirt dangerously close to melodrama but always feel raw and real.

If *Mommy* was just about dramatic blood and thunder it would be enough. But the precocious 25-year-old Dolan

imbues it with filmmaking pyrotechnics that are as striking as they are smart. Most obvious is his decision to shoot his film in a 1:1 aspect ratio, pillarboxing his square image with black bars on either side. Initially distracting, it forces you directly into the centre of action, sharpening the intimacy and intensity.

As the ADHD Steve, Pilon is by turns angelic and devilish, and Kyla (Clément) is superb as the insecure neighbour who makes a connection with him. It is to their credit they register at all in the

face of Dorval's dervish of a lead character. Die is ballsy white trash and Dorval's non-judgemental, tour de force performance makes her struggles compelling, and her difficult decisions unbearably moving. You simply cannot take your eyes off her for a second.

IAN FREER

VERDICT
Dolan has previously been accused of style over substance but here he draws both magnificently together. It's perhaps a little too long, but *Mommy* is a movie to make you feel alive. ★★★★

SAMBA

Intouchables 2: Intouchabler

RELEASED APRIL 2

RATED M

DIRECTORS/SCREENWRITERS

Eric Toledano, Olivier Nakache

CAST Omar Sy, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Tahar Rahim, Izia Higelin, Youngar Fall

RUNNING TIME 118 minutes

PLOT After 10 years as an illegal immigrant in Paris, Samba (Sy) is detained and meets volunteer aid Alice (Gainsbourg), an executive recuperating from a nervous breakdown. As each battle adversity alone and together, an unlikely, fledgling romance begins.

AFTER THE STUNNING SUCCESS OF 2011's feel-good charmer *The Intouchables*, French filmmakers Eric Toledano and Olivier Nakache return with a more sombre affair, and with them that film's breakout star, former comedian Omar Sy.

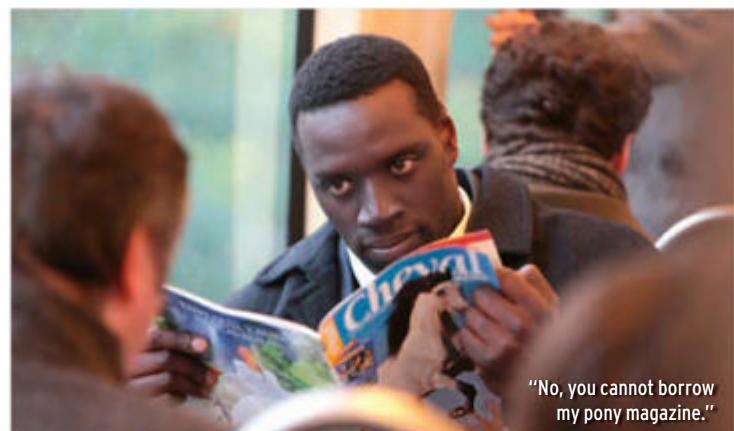
Sy is Samba, an illegal immigrant from Senegal who has

toiled in Paris for a decade to support his family back home. His application for residency is met with detention where he meets the kind but aloof Alice (Charlotte Gainsbourg), a white collar professional volunteering as an aid worker as she recovers from a nervous breakdown. Both are at their wits end, as a momentous slanging match testifies, but each is still drawn to the other.

In content and style, *Samba* is not your typical movie romance, more a tango of awkward interactions leading to a mutual bond and understanding.

Performances are pitch perfect: Sy is a warm and perceptive presence. He and Gainsbourg have chemistry and the latter welcomes the opportunity to show off her comedic chops.

Toledano and Nakache (with a screenplay co-written with



"No, you cannot borrow my pony magazine."

Delphine Coulin based on her novel) again mine drama and levity from a social issue and forge two people from different worlds into an intimate relationship against the backdrop of Paris and a winning soul-infused soundtrack.

In canvassing the tenuous existence of illegal immigrants in France, *Samba* becomes a grittier film and doesn't reach the heights of *joie de vivre* of *The Intouchables*. But there's still a bounty of humour – broad, O.T.T. and subtle – therein.

The filmmakers' signature tonal shifts aren't always harmonious; the finale feeling contrived to be both bitter and sweet. Still, *Samba* more than proves its worth as an entertaining romcom/drama with a socially aware bent. **JIM MITCHELL**

VERDICT
With its grittier, more uneven tone, it doesn't reach the feel-good highs of *The Intouchables*, but *Samba* still delivers a thoughtful, romantic comedy/drama with heart. ★★★★

SHAUN THE SHEEP: THE MOVIE

Too wool for school

RELEASED MARCH 26

RATED G

DIRECTORS Mark Burton, Richard Starzak

CAST (VOICE) Justin Fletcher, John Sparkes

RUNNING TIME 85 minutes

PLOT Shaun and his flock on Mossy Bottom Farm hatch a plan to get a day off. When it goes wrong, the farmer is sent careening into the big city in a runaway caravan. A bang on the head leaves him with no memory, forcing Shaun to mount a rescue.

IF YOU'RE OVER FIVE YEARS OLD, AS WE rather suspect you might be, then *Shaun The Sheep* is a supporting character from *Wallace And Gromit's A Close Shave*; a scuttly lamb who narrowly avoided destiny in a dog-food tin. If you are five or

under then he's the star of an eponymous hit TV show, in which he and a flock of quite dim sheep get up to smallish escapades on a farm. His TV episodes are about seven minutes long; on the big screen he has to fill about 90.

It's a bold move on Aardman's part to give *Shaun the movie* treatment as he is, being a sheep, mute. Everyone in his world is almost completely mute. The only one who makes noises close to speech is The Farmer, who just mumbles like he's had recent root canal. Yet the lack of dialogue is of no harm to the film. In fact, it marks it out, even more than the fact it's moulded from Plasticine. All the pressure is on the stop-motion animation and it makes a strong case for why this particular medium should not be viewed as



TRAILER TIME!

Use the free *viewa* app to scan this page to watch trailers for all the films on this spread.

Sheep thrills.

outdated. The personality of it is remarkable – no animation house can convey exasperation with the small shift of a unibrow quite like Aardman – and there is at no point any issue with conveying the story, which is complicated enough to include amnesia, the cruelty of society, evil animal controllers, the vapidly of celebrity and the complicated emotions of poodles. It is superb physical comedy. Think Monsieur Hulot robbed of opposable thumbs.

Although it's expanded the map of the TV show and beefed up the set-pieces, this isn't a 'big' movie. It still feels small-town and quaint, but that seems right. The Wallace and Gromit 'universe' should feel like you could cross it in about 45 minutes. Never mind the width, feel the quality. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT

Lower key than *Wallace And Gromit* or *Pirates*, but tightly packed with charm. ★★★★



THE BOOK OF LIFE

RELEASED APRIL 2 RATED PG

DIRECTOR Jorge R. Gutierrez **CAST** Zoe Saldana, Channing Tatum, Ron Perlman

THOUGH HE SERVES ONLY AS PRODUCER, Guillermo del Toro's fingerprints are all over this animated romcom woven around the Mexican Day Of The Dead. Childhood friends Manolo (Diego Luna) and Joaquin (Tatum) both love Maria (Saldana), and their rivalry has caught the eyes of Xibalba (Perlman) and La Muerte (Kate del Castillo), rulers of the two kingdoms of the dead, who take bets on the victor. The lively story is animated in an appealing wooden-puppet style, and while the script doesn't zing as much as the visuals, it's cute and likable.

OR ★★★★



SEVENTH SON

RELEASED OUT NOW RATED TBC

DIRECTOR Sergey Bodrov **CAST** Ben Barnes, Jeff Bridges, Julianne Moore

ADAPTED FROM JOSEPH DELANEY'S novel, *Seventh Son* involves a reluctant hero (Ben Barnes) enlisted by a wizened elder (Bridges) to fulfill an ancient prophecy. There's shape-shifting beasts, treasured amulets and all that obligatory blather about Greatness and Destiny. Barnes is technically present in most scenes, Bridges plays things as croakily as ever, and Julianne Moore's witch makes this the least impressive *Big Lebowski* reunion ever. Occasional humour and Harryhausen-aping confrontations are the only saving graces. **WILLIAM GOSS ★★★★★**



PROJECT ALMANAC

RELEASED OUT NOW RATED M

DIRECTOR Dean Israelite **CAST** Jonny Weston, Amy Landecker

2012'S CHRONICLE WAS A FOUND- footage yarn of superpowered teens. This shakycam effort does the same for time travel, but less well. Gifted nerd Jonny Weston spots his present-day self on a decade-old home video; then he and his friends find his dad's time machine. Youthful hijinks and wish fulfilment follow, before things go bad. The time-travel is interestingly depicted through distorted camera footage, but the story rehashes umpteen other films, with holey logic, lumpy pacing and often indecipherable dialogue.

ANDREW OSMOND ★★



A LITTLE CHAOS

RELEASED MARCH 26 RATED TBC

DIRECTOR Alan Rickman **CAST** Kate Winslet, Matthias Schoenaerts

IN PARIS 1682, VISIONARY LANDSCAPE designer Sabine De Barra (a soulful, full-blooded Winslet) wins the job of fashioning an outdoor ballroom in King Louis XIV's (Alan Rickman) grand Palace Of Versailles gardens. A commoner out of her depth at court and way ahead of societal convention, Sabine clashes with royal landscape artist Le Notre (Schoenaerts) before love blooms. Only one thing rankles in Rickman's beautifully crafted film: Sabine is a historical fiction, and history is the poorer for it.

JIM MITCHELL ★★★★

Two hours later and still no sign of the slipped contact lens.



FIFTY SHADES OF GREY

Porn again, Christian

RELEASED OUT NOW

RATED MA15+

DIRECTOR Sam Taylor-Johnson

SCREENWRITER Kelly Marcel

CAST Dakota Johnson, Jamie Dornan, Eloise Mumford, Jennifer Ehle, Marcia Gay Harden

RUNNING TIME 125 minutes

PLOT When her roommate falls ill, virginal student Anastasia Steele (Johnson) steps in to interview billionaire Christian Grey (Dornan) for her student newspaper. The pair are instantly drawn to each other and begin a whirlwind affair of pleasure and pain in front of a series of ridiculously large windows.

ARRIVING WITH ALL THE APPENDAGES

of a modern blockbuster – a Beyoncé tie-in, a trailer YouTubed 193 million times, a LEGO parody – *Fifty Shades Of Grey* is one of those movies that the “internet” had condemned terrible, sight unseen. The truth is a little more mundane. Sam Taylor-Johnson’s film of E.L. James’s *Twilight* fan fiction-turned-phenomenon is neither so terrible to be laughable

nor so brilliant to be powerful. Instead, we get a sparky first third, a rote obsessive love story, anodyne kinkiness, contentious sexual politics, slivers of skilful filmmaking and a promising turn from Dakota Johnson.

The set-up is a simple one: bookish Anastasia Steele (Johnson) meets Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan), a business tycoon hiding a troubled past, a lust for BDSM and a penchant for playing really miserable tunes on the piano. He lavishes his wealth on her (a first-edition *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles*, a snazzy red Audi) hoping she'll sign a contract to become his “submissive”. She yearns for a more typical movie-and-a-dinner-type relationship but tests her ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ limits anyway.

For the first 45 minutes or so, Taylor-Johnson and screenwriter Kelly Marcel play this smart. Firstly they strip away the book's ropey language, all the “Holy mackerel!” this and “inner goddess” that. They also seem to pitch the action on two levels. The fans get their big

moments – the first clinch in the lift, Grey's catchphrase, “Laters, baby” – but sceptics can glean the sense that the filmmakers are wise to the ludicrousness of it all. From the slick-haired secretaries at Grey House to a business meeting where the agenda includes vaginal fisting and genital clamps, the tone is playful, even flirting with satire.

But eventually the fun starts to flag. As the emotions get more intense and we begin to learn the motivations underpinning Grey's need for dominance (why can't he just be a perv?), the film gets bogged down in repetitive, earnest romantic drama. There are dull family meetings, greenhouse confessions, even a gliding sequence, something not seen in a cinema since Pierce Brosnan's heyday. The less sure-footed Taylor-Johnson's movie gets, the more insistent Danny Elfman's score becomes.

Even the naughtiness won't keep you gripped. In James's novel, there are 14 sex scenes that fetch up one flogging, two spankings, five tying-ups and 38 orgasms.

The movie dials this back to four or five sexcapades. After a beautifully edited bed sesh, the antics in the infamous “red room of pain” are antiseptic, each visit more overblown and less sexy than the last. Peacock feathers, whips and the inventory at Tie Rack all get an outing but little of it displays any character insight or erotic edge.

Dornan looks the part but feels more befuddled than broken, failing to eat up the screen as you'd hope. Johnson, ironically, dominates. She gives Anastasia both a strength and sense of humour, be it taking the piss out of Grey (and the idea of the character) in a drunken phone call or busting little moves to Frank Sinatra's *Witchcraft*. She gives *Fifty Shades Of Grey* more colour than it has any right to have. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT

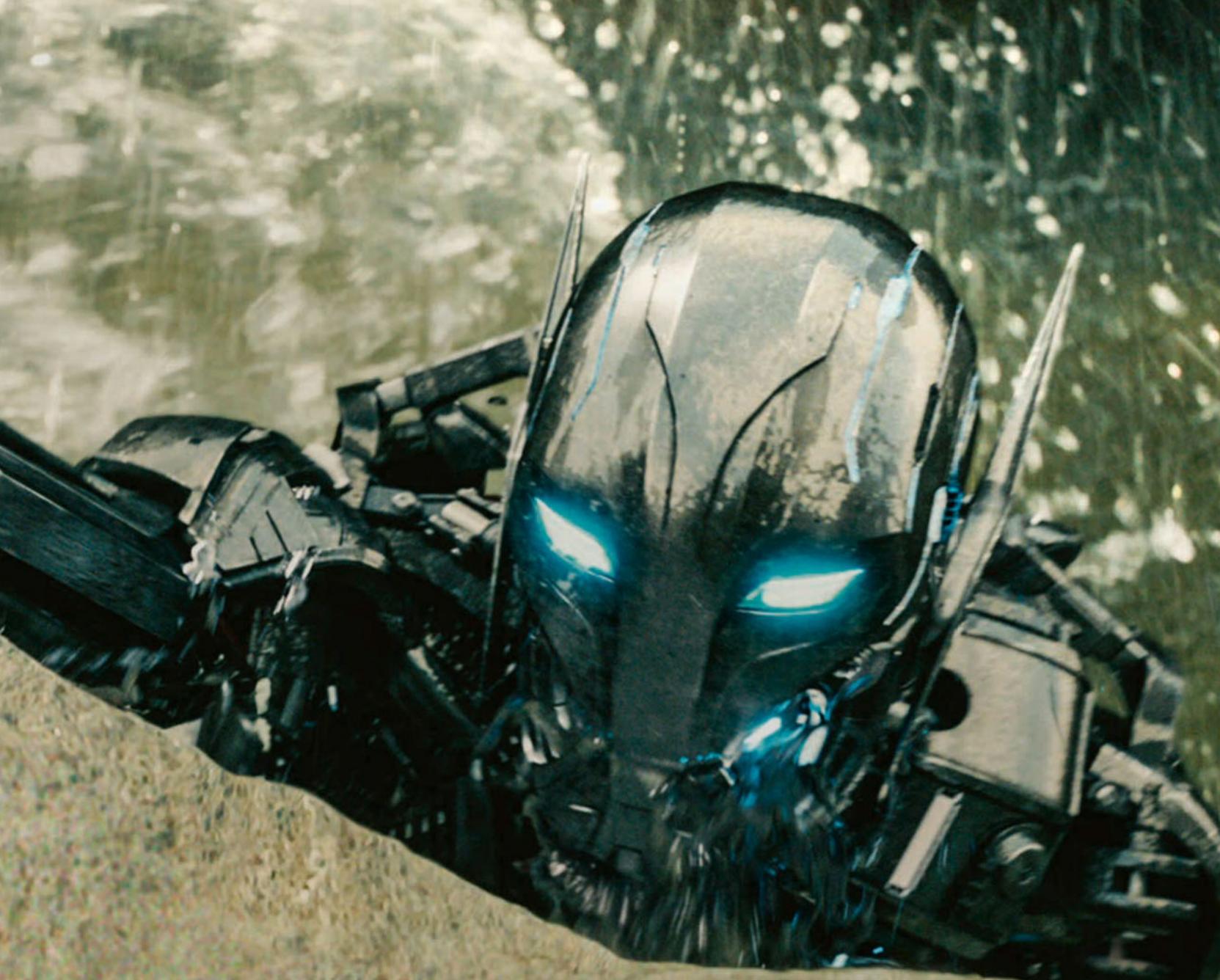
Neither a camp laughing stock nor a shocking study of sexual obsession, *Fifty Shades Of Grey* starts well but fumbles in the dark. See it for Dakota Johnson. For the rest, find your safe word. ★★★★



GENOCIDAL ROBOT ULTRON IS THE AVENGERS' GREATEST THREAT YET... WELL, EITHER HIM OR DIRECTOR JOSS WHEDON, WHO IS DETERMINED THAT *AGE OF ULTRON* WILL CHANGE THE MARVEL SUPERTEAM FOREVER

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

RISE OF THE AVENGERS



CHINE



VENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON director Joss Whedon, famously one of the nicest guys in Hollywood (ask anyone), leans back in his chair and sighs. It's the end of a long and exhausting day on set on his multi-million-dollar production, and he's just glad to get back to his trailer, sit down with *Empire* and chew the fat for —

"YOU NEED TO DIE!"

Beg your pardon?

"YOU ARE A BLIGHT UPON HUMANITY!"

Sorry?

"WAAAAAAGH! DIE DIE DIE!"

So this is where it all ends, here, at Shepperton Studios, at the hands of one of the nicest guys in Hollywood (ask anyone)...

Thankfully, though, Whedon doesn't want to end *Empire*'s miserable existence. He's merely channelling his latest creation, Ultron, the technological terror that will torment Earth's Mightiest Heroes during his new movie. And, as such, he's got a whole different target in mind.

"I've been working on a lot of Ultron scenes, so I'm very anti-Avengers right now," he explains. "You can't write

someone if you don't love them and I've come to the conclusion that Ultron is right. The Avengers need to die."

A FEW HOURS earlier on this lovely late April morning, *Empire* is standing on a Shepperton soundstage, watching as the Avengers, very much alive, assemble.

Last go around, the superhero team comprising Robert Downey Jr.'s Iron Man, Chris Evans's Captain America, Mark Ruffalo's Hulk, Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow, Chris Hemsworth's Thor and Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye, didn't cohere until the final act. In fact, they spent only a couple of days together as a unit, and one of those was to shoot the movie's final post-credits sting, where they all tuck into shawarma.

Not this time. *Age Of Ultron* begins with the Avengers already together for what Whedon calls a "pre-credits Bondian blow-out" that will involve the team paying a surprise visit to the East European castle hideout of evil Hydra operative Baron von Strucker (Thomas Kretschmann) in order to retrieve an item of great value: Loki's sceptre from the first movie.

Item duly retrieved, today's scene will see the Avengers fly home to New York in their new Quinjet, souped-up by their new

BRIEFING

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

RELEASED: April 23
DIRECTOR: Joss Whedon
STARRING: Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Mark Ruffalo, Scarlett Johansson, Chris Hemsworth, Don Cheadle, Jeremy Renner, James Spader, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Elizabeth Olsen, Thomas Kretschmann, Andy Serkis

STORY: When Tony Stark (Downey Jr.) and Bruce Banner (Ruffalo) attempt to ensure the world's safety by creating an artificially intelligent peacekeeping force, it accidentally results in deadly, self-replicating robo-threat Ultron (Spader), who wants humanity to be completely eliminated.

LIKE THE SENTINELS, YOU MEAN? Shush!
That's the X-Men universe! Very different from this one. Jeez!



CAP UP
Use the free **viewa** app to scan the page and enjoy our *Age Of Ultron* trailer and clip collection.

Captain America (Chris Evans) in his new, Stark-funded threads.





benefactor and boss, Tony Stark. The mocked-up Quinjet sits in the middle of the soundstage, raised roughly 4.5 metres into the air on a series of platforms and scaffolding. *Empire* has just finished a guided tour of the interior (more spacious than the old S.H.I.E.L.D.-built model, although there are still no toilet facilities in sight), complete with the sceptre on display — when they arrive.

Hemsworth, by sheer virtue of being taller than everyone else and topped with a shining, blond ponytail, is the first Avenger *Empire* notices. He clammers up onto the set, turns round and offers his hand to Ruffalo, who today is in grey-shirted Bruce Banner mode. The rest of the group follow, a crew member passes up Captain America's shield to Evans, and then Whedon, coffee cup in hand, appears.

The director confabs with his actors, and sketches out the scene. "This shot goes all the way from the top to Natasha joining Bruce," he says. As Stark is flying the ship, Downey Jr. goes and sits in the pilot's seat at the front. Renner lies down on a table in the middle of the jet and clutches his stomach while a fake drip is attached to his arm. It's clear that, whatever went down at von Strucker's, it has left the Avengers' ace archer in considerable distress.

Ruffalo asks, "Is the Quinjet loud? Do we have to yell?"

"It was on *The Avengers*," says Evans.

Ruffalo nods. But in the end, there is no yelling. This Quinjet is clearly fitted with noise-cancelling technology.

Blocking and rehearsal complete, Whedon is ready to go for a take. The clapperboard informs us this is "Day 25, Slate 31, Take 1" on the film currently known, in an attempt to throw snoopers off the scent, as *Afterparty* (the first *Avengers* went under the pseudonym *Group Hug*). The back doors of the Quinjet close up, sealing in the actors. "Action" is called.

As the dialogue plays out, it becomes clear that Banner has Hulked out, or what he calls a "Code Green", during the assault on von Strucker's fortress, and is deeply troubled by it. Johansson's Natasha tries to reassure him — "If you hadn't been there, there would have been double the casualties." Banner grimaces, and replies with a none-more-Whedon line: "You know, sometimes exactly what I want to hear isn't exactly what I want to hear."

Seeking back-up, Natasha turns to a Norse god. "Thor, report on The Hulk?" Hemsworth immediately lights up and lets rip with a rousing tribute to all the violence unleashed by The Hulk, filled with words like "screams" and "victims" and "whimpering". Seeing that it has

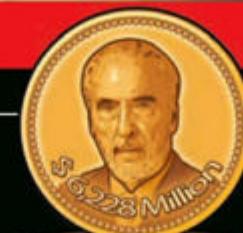


Daddy issues: Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) with an early version of his scrappy offspring, Ultron.

A THE REAL FRANCHISE HEROES

SUPPORTING ACTORS WITH THE MOST FINGERS IN THE BIGGEST MOVIE PIES...

ILLUSTRATIONS BILL MC CONKEY



CHRISTOPHER LEE

*APPEARED IN THE EXTENDED EDITION OF THE RETURN OF THE KING. **AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS. ***APPEARED AS THE MOUTH OF SAURON IN THE EXTENDED EDITION OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

the opposite effect to that intended on Banner, the God Of Thunder turns God Of Blunder, stammering and stumbling, digging himself deeper into a hole. (Later, Whedon will tell *Empire* that he loves writing for Thor on this movie. "Hemsworth can really commit.")

Whedon bounds across to Ruffalo. "You should be like, 'Oh, that Thor! You should have an, 'Oh, shit!' moment when he says 'gates of hell', then you realise that he's exaggerating."

While they wait for the crew to reset, the actors josh with each other. Ruffalo and Johansson start singing together — "Hey, what if this is the next *Rent*?" she asks — while Evans, Renner and Hemsworth chat among themselves. Downey Jr., squirrelled away at the

front of the set, in the cockpit, turns around and joins in, casting a friendly, benevolent eye over proceedings.

It all seems fun. There's a great spirit on set. Who on earth would want to kill these guys?

THE FIRST TIME

Joss Whedon met Marvel Studios chief Kevin Feige, to discuss taking on the mammoth job of turning the company's grand gamble, *The Avengers*, into reality, he actually ended up pitching the sequel as well. "I said, 'Well, I don't know if I'm right for this, or if I should do this, but the second one should totally be Ultron.'"

Created by Roy Thomas and John Buscema in 1968, Ultron is an incredibly

powerful, virtually indestructible, genocidal robot whose only desire in life is to put The Avengers in the ground. Visually striking, with a perma-grin like an open wound, he would become an iconic villain for the superteam over the next 50 years, and clearly made an impression on the young Whedon. Well, of sorts.

"I read a lot of books with him and I couldn't tell you who he was or why he did what he did," says the director. "He was such a huge baddie for them, and he's so exciting, but in some ways he's not that exciting at all. If you look at the comics, he's got that mouth and he's like, 'I WILL DESTROY YOU!' Then 30 years later, it's 'ANY DAY NOW! TOTAL DESTROYING! I LOOK ➤'



Andy Serkis, playing an as-yet-to-be-identified character. We're guessing he's a baddie. Quite possibly Ulysses Klaw.



ANDY SERKIS

HUGO WEAVING

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

BRUCE SPENCE***

LIKE WILLEM DAFOE IN THE FIRST SPIDER-MAN MOVIE! For me, what was interesting is that he is this angry."

During the shoot for *The Avengers*, Whedon's desire to take Ultron from page to screen intensified. "It was on the set of the Helicarrier in the first movie," says Feige. "We were talking about J.A.R.V.I.S. (Stark's A.I. butler, voiced by Paul Bettany in the three *Iron Man* movies and the first *Avengers*), and the various A.I. in the franchise, and how they could evolve going forward into Ultron."

There have, of course, been more than a few killer robots since the dawn of cinematic history. Some have been a few circuits short of a full motherboard. And this year alone doesn't exactly skimp on the bonkers 'borg front, with the likes of *Ex Machina*, *Chappie*, *Big Hero 6* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* serving up several different types of droid. Feige, though, promises that Ultron will be a true one-off.

"I KILL THEM! ALL OF THEM! I DO IT!" JOSS WHEDON

"He sounds unlike any other robotic character in movie history," he says. "Joss was never interested in a monotone robotic character. There's a lot of angst in terms of pulling something off and making a robot interesting, but when you have Joss Whedon writing his dialogue and James Spader performing it, most of the angst goes away." As the film's first trailer, which debuted last October, makes clear, Ultron will have a lot of dialogue, all delivered in Spader's unmistakable voice, syrupy yet malignant, like poisoned toffee. "I needed a guy who can give you the Morpheus, but then just LOSE HIS SHIT," explains Whedon. "On the one hand I could talk for hours with this character, and on the other hand every time you cut to him it's expensive! With Tom [Hiddleston, as Loki, the last film's big bad] it was, 'Write a longer scene, save money.'"

When you're making the sequel to the third-biggest film of all time, though, it's easier to come by a little bit of extra cash to realise your vision. The hardest part for Whedon was making Ultron work in terms of the movie's plot. So for that, he >

NEW AVENGER #1

AARON TAYLOR-JOHNSON IS QUICKSILVER

SPOILER
WARNING!

Quicksilver, aka Pietro Maximoff, can sprint at incredible speeds. How did you handle the running scenes?

Every time I enter or exit a scene I am a blur. I would perfect the skid really well. You know how you're a kid at school and on a rainy day in the playground the skidding would be a competition? It was like that. I was really good at skidding and not just in straight lines. I would run in and then do the scene and run out and then they'd have to do it exactly the same again but without any actors. A 'Pietro Pass' is what they'd call it. Then they might need an 'Iron Man Pass' and someone might go in dressed as a big Iron Man, and then a 'Hulk Pass' and they'd get the biggest stunt guy, who's like, fucking 135kg of muscle and he'd stand there painted green.

Signing to Marvel, you're committing to multiple films over many years. Is that daunting?

No. It's the opposite, really. If I was attached to some daft kiddie franchise, that's when you go, "I'm signed on to two or three of these and I don't even like the character I'm playing, I want to shoot myself in the face." But how can you not have fun on something like this?

What sort of guy is Pietro?

He's very agitated because everything runs too slowly for him. He's quick at everything. He's quick to lose his temper. It's more about Pietro and Wanda together, a yin/yang where he's very physical and very protective of her and she's very internal and always mothering him. Pietro doesn't fucking trust anybody. The only one he cares for and at the end of the day will jump in front of a bullet for is his sister, Wanda.

You're the second Quicksilver on the big screen in less than a year, following Evan Peters in *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*...

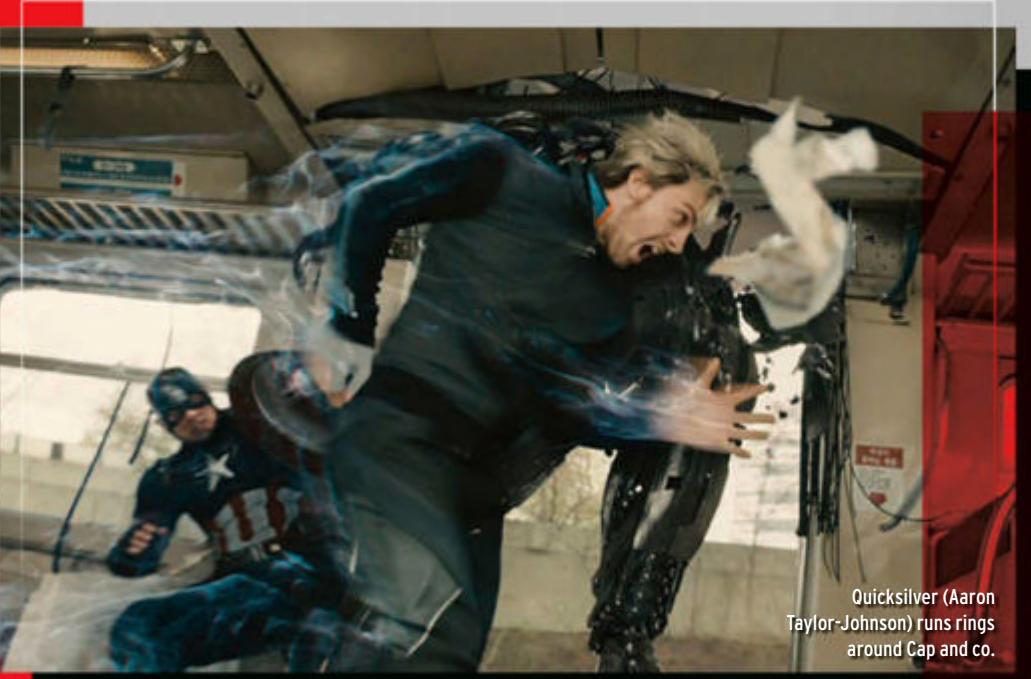
That was already out there before I even signed the contract. If I'd cared that much, I would have said no. It didn't phase me for one minute. What I knew of it was that Evan Peters's Quicksilver was set in the '70s, and it was different. I didn't watch any of it while making *Avengers* but I did see it recently, and it was fantastic.

Yours seems to be a more intense Pietro.

I hope so. We all wanted to pull it back to the comic book. That's why we did East European accents. And you don't get Quicksilver without Scarlet Witch. I think there's going to be a lot of love for her. Scarlet Witch is going to make a huge impression.

What was it like working with James Spader, who plays Ultron?

He's so intense and inspiring, even with a mo-cap onesie on. Ultron is supposed to be a good two to three metres tall. Spader's not that tall, obviously, and we had a big eyeline for us which was a bar about a metre above his head, but I couldn't help looking at his eyes. We'd be looking at him and then it'd be like, "Oh fuck, look up!"



Quicksilver (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) runs rings around Cap and co.

NEED TO KNOW QUICKSILVER



Who is Quicksilver?

The fastest man alive.

Isn't that Usain Bolt?

No. Pietro Maximoff, aka Quicksilver, has a top speed in excess of Mach 4 (around 4800kph), although he has been known to travel faster than light.

How do the other Avengers even keep up?

They don't. Over the years, the comic book Pietro has switched team affiliations several times, appearing in mutant group X-Factor and the Inhumans (who hit the big screen in 2018), and the Brotherhood Of Evil Mutants.

Is he faster than DC Comics' The Flash?

That fan-boy debate ever rages. The pair clashed in the *Justice League Of America/Avengers* crossover comics of 2003, with The Flash most often coming out on top.

had to do a little bit of meddling with Marvel history.

In the comics, Ultron is the creation of Hank Pym, one of the company's coterie of incredibly bright super-scientists. But Pym had already been bagsied by Edgar Wright for his *Ant-Man* movie (which comes out in July now directed by Peyton Reed, with Pym played by Michael Douglas), and Whedon didn't want to introduce another big-brained boffin into the mix — not when he had one right under his nose.

"Ultron needs to be the brainchild of The Avengers," he says. "He hates The Avengers for bringing him into this world. And in the world of The Avengers and the MCU [Marvel Cinematic Universe], Tony Stark is that guy. It's a more interesting relationship between Tony and Ultron if Tony was once like, 'You know what would be a really great idea...?'"

BACK ON SET, lunch is called and *Empire* is informed that Ultron's dad is ready to speak to us. Jumping into a golf buggy, we're driven past a car park filled with cast and crew trailers, and eventually come to a gated enclosure, complete with security guard. Reputation clearly preceding us, the guard opens the gate and we drive through to find a semicircle of trailers. This must be Avengers Village, we think.

Then Robert Downey Jr. emerges grinning into the sunlight and it dawns on us. This is Downey Jr. Village. All the trailers are for him and Team Downey Jr.. The trailers we passed earlier, in the car park, are where the rest of the team resides. Nice work if you can get it. And you can get it if you happen to be the guy who toplined two of the six biggest films of all time.

Sipping on a smoothie, Downey Jr. looks relaxed and is his usual, quippy, is-Stark-Downey Jr.-or-is-Downey Jr.-Stark? self. Although he was clearly the big man on campus of the first *Avengers* movie, Stark didn't drive the plot, which hinged on the contretemps between Thor and his meddlesome half-brother. *Age Of Ultron*, though, is Tonytastic.

In the period since the events of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, when S.H.I.E.L.D. was disbanded, Stark has stepped in to bankroll the Avengers, turning his New York base, Stark Tower, into the Avengers' HQ. He's made Steve Rogers the battlefield leader, and given the team upgrades where necessary (expect Hawkeye to have some pretty funky arrows this time around). But for Tony Stark, saving the world is not enough. "One of the ideas of the Avengers, according to Tony, is to make



Gamma time!
Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) puts on his angry eyes...





Cap and the cape: Thor (Chris Hemsworth), unimpressed by the suggestion he rename himself 'Captain Asgard'.



... and goes "Code Green" as Hulk. But can Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) calm him down?

the Avengers obsolete because that's what we're fighting for: a world that doesn't need us," says Downey Jr.. "It's something where Tony's starting to look at the back nine and thinking, 'What is the endgame for all this?' You [the other Avengers] look young, healthy, buff, and on fire. But I might want to have a family one day."

Which he does, after a fashion. Enlisting his new BFF, Banner, Stark whips up plans for a robotic police force. What he doesn't bargain for is that his advanced A.I. builds itself a robot body, and declares war — not just on the Avengers or humanity, but on Stark. "There's no way you're not going to play father-son things," says Whedon. "Stark is definitely a daddy figure to Ultron, but it's more complex than that. You can't just say it's a kid rebellion. I'm not going to make a movie where the child says to the father, 'You messed up. Now I have to kill you!' That's a bit mean."

"TONY'S THINKING, 'WHAT IS THE ENDGAME?'"

ROBERT DOWNEY JR.

From there, the newfound bonhomie of the Avengers is swiftly blown apart as, faced with Ultron, his superpowered sidekicks Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen) and Quicksilver (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and a growing army of replica Ultrons, they try desperately to save the world. And when they're not busy doing that, they turn on each other — in particular, Stark, who understandably becomes very easy to blame for their current predicament. To a lesser extent, for his part in Ultron's creation, so does Banner, and it's this crack in the relationship that could lead to the Science Bros. (as Banner and Stark were dubbed by the internet following the first film) coming to science blows. "[It's like] somebody talks you into being their wheelman for a sure thing, and it ends up like *Heat*," laughs Downey Jr.. "I certainly don't think Tony means to get Banner in all that trouble. It would be fun if he did, but I don't think he does."

No *Avengers* movie is complete without a spot of friendly fire, and the burgeoning rift between Banner and Stark will come to a head in the film's ➤

big Avenger-on-Avenger action moment, in which Stark dons an enlarged suit, the Hulkbuster, and tries to bust the Hulk. The problem is, Banner may no longer be able to stop things from getting out of hand.

"Hulk is the wild card," says Ruffalo. "As much as you feel that Bruce has some mastery over it, there's some part of him that doesn't completely trust it. He's definitely worried that the day is going to come when the Hulk will get the best of him, and maybe won't release him. There is the day when everyone expects it to go wrong... And that day comes. And Bruce designed the contingency plan."

Stark has never been a character devoid of hubris, but *Age Of Ultron* drives that home, his pioneering nature resulting in a threat that could eventually destroy everything he's worked so hard to build. It's a lesson that's not lost on Kevin Feige, who's keenly aware that the studio he has built so meticulously could be brought to its knees by overconfidence, or the pressure of following up its biggest hit.

"Pressure can lead to second-guessing," says Feige. "Pressure can

lead to some not-great decisions. We've made all these movies trying, despite the pressure and the expectations, to stop everything, to turn off the noise and go, 'What would we want to see?'"

It's easy to forget now, just three years later, what a huge risk *The Avengers* was for Marvel Studios, whose entire future — all the different Phases, all the new and existing franchises — would have been vastly different, and maybe even jeopardised, if it hadn't worked. Nothing like this, a shared universe with different franchises coming together to form one giant whole, had ever been attempted before. But it paid off handsomely. As well as being a cracking piece of entertainment, far better than it had any right to be, with sharp dialogue, well-drawn characters and a raft of crowd-pleasing moments (most of which involved the Hulk), *The Avengers* was a game-changer.

And not just for Marvel, which has seen each of its releases since then enjoy what became known as an 'Avengers bump' at the box office. Since its still record-breaking \$200 million opening weekend in the US, almost every studio

NEED TO KNOW ULTRON



Who is Ultron?

A super-intelligent robot who despises mankind, Ultron is almost as human as the people it — sorry, he — wants to annihilate. He's capricious, playful, malevolent, brooding, and an utter bastard.

What can he do?

In the comics, he's

incredibly strong, fast, powerful and smart. In the movie, his power levels have been pared. "We have to make him slightly less omnipotent because he'd win," laughs Whedon.

He can still replicate himself, right?

He certainly can, as seen in the excellent Comic-Con concept poster. "We're not going to draw a picture like that and then leave you hanging," teases Whedon.

Why does he hang out with Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch?

"I needed someone for Ultron to talk to," says Whedon. "As powerful as Ultron is, if he builds more Ultrons, they're Ultrons. There's no reason for him to talk to them because they're him."

MEANWHILE, ON TV...

A S.H.I.E.L.D. MAIDEN

EMPIRE GOES ON SET OF AGENT CARTER TO TALK MARVEL'S FIRST TV LEADING LADY

WE'VE INTERRUPTED FILMING. ACTUALLY, IT'S not *Empire*'s fault, it's Dominic Cooper's. At least, according to Hayley Atwell, who sweeps into the conference room above the LA-based stages of *Agent Carter* and announces that her co-star's voice has carried all the way down to the set where she's trying to deliver dialogue. It's okay, though. She and Cooper are old pals.

The pair head up Marvel Studios' latest show for US network television, Atwell starring as Peggy Carter (girlfriend of a pre-frozen Captain America, now a founding member of superspy organisation S.H.I.E.L.D.) and Cooper as suave inventor Howard Stark (aka Iron Man's pa). Both were first seen in 2011's *Captain America: The First Avenger* and last appeared together in the 'One-Shot' short film that graced the *Iron Man 3* DVD.

First pitched as a potential TV series by Marvel bigwig Louis D'Esposito, it will, by the time you read this, be airing in the States as an eight-episode bridge between the two halves of *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s second season (see page 64), dealing with the formation of the Agency and its early days. The show, which has already received rave reviews, sees her dealing with sexism and disrespect, while also tracking down various miscreants and MacGuffins to help clear Stark's name when he's accused of selling his inventions to enemy powers.

Atwell is thrilled to return to the role, one which she finds a happy physical challenge. "I've had a lot of confidence that came from my drama school training," she says. "We did a lot of physical theatre and a lot of unarmed combat. And I also played

rugby at school: I was called Hulk Hayley, because I was quite tough." She may not turn into an enormous green, raging monster on the show, but she can certainly handle the villains. "When she fights, Peggy will also use her intelligence," explains Atwell. "She'll open a fridge to block something, or pick up whatever is around her and use it, rather than do the splits in the air."

"You could watch this series without having any understanding of the world that it exists within," insists Dominic Cooper. "It very much can function as a spy thriller." But this is the Marvel Cinematic Universe, so there'll be plenty of crossover potential; Peggy made an appearance in *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s second season opener. Although mention of the rumour that she might also crop up in a flashback during *Ant-Man* is met by Atwell with a careful glance at Disney and Marvel staffers. She then delivers a smile and an offhand, "It will be fun to watch and see..." JAMES WHITE

AGENT CARTER HAS YET TO BE PICKED UP FOR AUSTRALIAN TV, BUT EXPECT IT SOME TIME THIS YEAR.



Ultron (James Spader) in finished form. Spader worked with Andy Serkis's Imaginarium on the performance capture.

in Hollywood has scrambled to replicate the Marvel model. Universal's trying to resurrect its classic monsters, from Dracula to *The Mummy*; Warner Bros.' fast-tracked raft of DC comics movies starts next year with *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* and is mapped out until 2020; while Fox's late-blooming attempts to get an X-Men universe off the ground will see three mutant movies next year.

In response, Marvel has become more confident — bolshie, even — announcing its plans for Phase 3 all the way up to the first half of 2019, including a raft of potential new franchises (including Benedict Cumberbatch as Doctor Strange, Chadwick Boseman as Black Panther, Captain Marvel and The Inhumans), guaranteed hits in the shape of *Guardians Of The Galaxy 2* and *Thor: Ragnarok*, and not one but two *Avengers* movies, *Infinity War — Parts I and II*, due in 2018 and 2019.

Then there's the first big shot across Warner Bros. and DC's bows: *Captain America: Civil War*. Due next April, the movie for a while occupied the same date as *Batman V* ▶



Agent Carter (Hayley Atwell) hits the paperwork with (l-r) Daniel Sousa (Enver Gjokaj), Jack Thompson (Chad Michael Murray) and Roger Dooley (Shea Whigham).

Superman: Dawn Of Justice. The smart money would once have been on the movie with the 'lesser' superheroes moving to another date, but Feige stuck to his guns and Warner blinked first, moving its tentpole to March. When it was revealed that the movie would pit Rogers against Stark, Captain America against Iron Man, Evans against Downey Jr., that decision suddenly seemed like a wise move. A Batman/Superman movie moving away from a Captain America movie would have been unthinkable a couple of years ago, but Marvel has levelled the playing field. Now Captain America is big news (*The Winter Soldier* grossed more worldwide than *Man Of Steel*), and the addition of Downey Jr., who renegotiated his Marvel deal to sign on to the movie, makes it an even bigger juggernaut.

"They said to me, 'If we have you, we can do this, or *Cap 3* has to be something else,'" says Downey Jr.. "It's nice to feel

"THIS MOVIE IS ABOUT TEARING THEM APART."

JOSS WHEDON

needed. And at this point it's about helping each other, too. I look at it as a competition and I go, 'Wow, maybe if these two franchises teamed up and I can take even a lesser position, with people I like and directors I respect, maybe we can keep things bumping along.'

In the Mark Millar-Steve McNiven run on which the movie will be very loosely based, a cataclysmic event triggers a call for all superhumans to be registered by the government, something Rogers opposes fiercely, while Stark — the former iconoclast — surprises everyone by signing up. The movie's plot will require a recalibration of Stark's character and beliefs in order for the hero upon which Marvel Studios was built to become a convincing antagonist for Captain America. *Age Of Ultron* — where he's responsible for a villain who threatens millions — would seem to be tipping him in the right direction.

"It's natural to change your views," says Downey Jr., who has stated that his political views were altered vastly by his



You're new to the Avengers world. Is there a boot camp you have to attend? Or an initiation?

I was thinking there would be a prank, or something physically extreme they'd make me go through, but there wasn't. The coolest thing about Scarlet Witch is, because you've never seen her, we got to create how she moves. Joss was really inspired by dancers, and so he knew that he wanted to change visually how she moves, to be more like a dancer than a fighter. I didn't really have to do much stunt training. Instead I trained with a dancer, Jenny White, which was its own kind of soreness, but it wasn't what I thought it would be.

What can the Scarlet Witch do?

Age Of Ultron is almost our origin story, so we don't have one of those montages where heroes learn all of their powers in five minutes. We are still discovering the things we can and cannot do. The extent of her powers isn't fully explored in *Ultron*. But she can manipulate objects. And she has visions, and she has the ability to share them.

In the comics, she's a mutant. But not here.

[Laughs] She's not a mutant. I almost screwed that

one up at Comic-Con. I almost said "mutated" and everyone was, "Ooooh!" It was the worst thing ever.

The last time you worked with Aaron, on *Godzilla*, you played husband and wife. Now you're brother and sister. Isn't that weird?

No, because you never actually are husband and wife with someone you're working with. You're just friends. You never have a relationship with them.

It must help to have worked with Aaron before.

Aaron and I have become buddies. It makes it a bit different to have a familiarity with someone before you start a job, especially when you're about to play twins who are inseparable, more so than husband and wife.

Initially at least, the twins team up with Ultron, which seems a strange decision. Why?

Obviously there are plenty of countries in the world that hate America, for whatever history and pain they believe it has caused their own country and their own lives. That is the world we have created for Wanda and Pietro, to have been brought up in. What you're told a lot of times growing up is that that country, those people, their way of living is the reason why we have been bombed. They [*the Avengers*] are the worst evil in Wanda and Pietro's mind, not this guy who hasn't done anything yet.

And what's that relationship like with the Avengers, when it comes?

[Tentatively] I don't know how I can answer that question except to say that... They're needed.

In the comics, Wanda becomes romantically involved with The Vision. Can we expect that?

[Laughs] I don't know what you're talking about...





NEED TO KNOW SCARLET WITCH



Who is Scarlet Witch?
She's Wanda Maximoff, who has the ability to manipulate the fabric of reality itself.

And she first appeared in the Avengers comic?

No. Wanda and her brother Pietro arrived in *X-Men* #4 in 1964 as part of the Brotherhood Of Evil Mutants, doing the dark bidding of their dad, Magneto. Both saw the light and joined the Avengers.

She sounds rather scarily powerful...

And how. In the comics, she once went insane and wiped out most of mutantkind simply by saying three little words.

"No more mutants?"

Yes. Thanks to the tricky rights situation with Fox, which owns the X-Men characters, the twins are mutants no more so far as the Marvel Cinematic Universe is concerned.

stint in prison. "The main thing to me is, what sort of incident could occur, and what sort of framework could we find Tony in? The clues about where we might find him next are in Ultron. But what would it take for Tony to completely turn around everything he's stood for? Joss brings this up all the time. It's kind of weird that these guys would have all these throw-downs all over planet Earth and yet when the movie's over, nobody minds. What would the American government do if this were real? Wouldn't it be interesting to see Tony doing something you wouldn't imagine?"

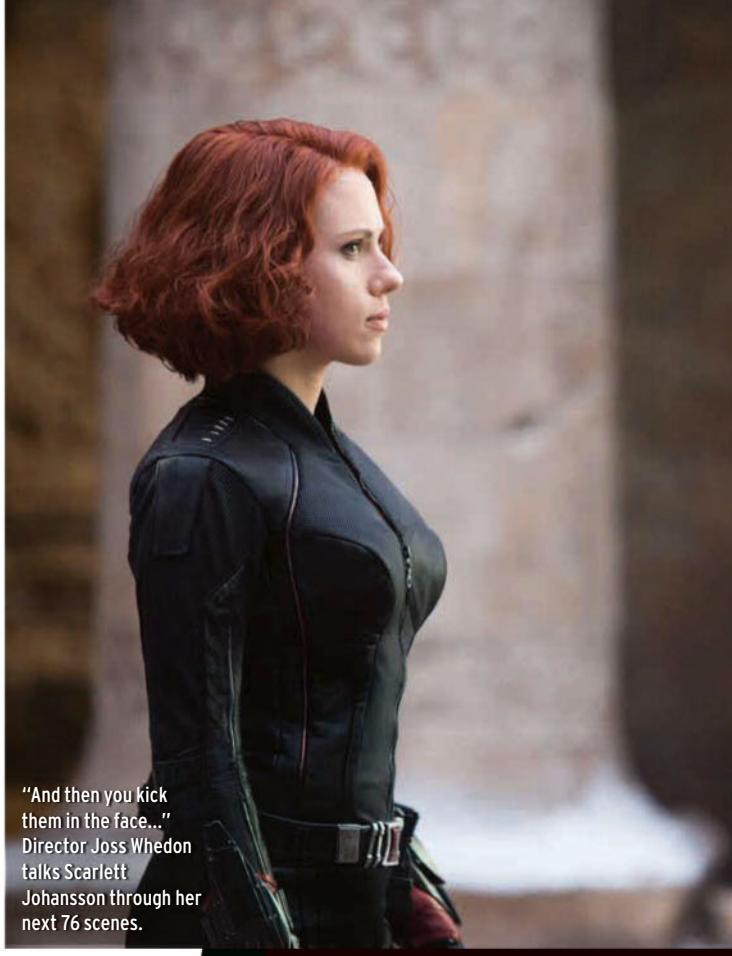
Although, for Downey Jr., that won't include becoming an out-and-out bad guy. "I wouldn't put it that way," he says. "The biggest question is, for Chris and for Cap, how do we bring Cap to a place where people go, 'Man, I never thought I would see such a vast change in Steve.' After you see *Snowpiercer*, you're like, 'I want to see a little bit of that guy.'" But possibly without a monologue about eating babies. "We don't want to scare the kids," laughs Downey Jr.. "Maybe just a sniff."

Civil War is fascinating for many reasons. It's not just *Captain America 3*, it's also essentially *Iron Man 4*. And, with the likes of Boseman's *Black Panther* confirmed and others to follow, it could also function as the third *Avengers* movie. And, if you believe everything you hear, it will involve a radically altered Avengers team. Which begs the question: what will have happened to the old one?

JOSS WHEDON HAS

done it. He's finally killed the Avengers.

It's now July, and *Empire* has come to Comic-Con in San Diego where, as the closing act on Saturday, Marvel has unzipped its fly and marked its territory. The Avengers, plus Spader, Olsen and Taylor-Johnson, are up on stage, the crowd has gone suitably bananas, and then Feige (Whedon is back in London with a sore knee) unveils the icing on the cake, namely the first footage from the film. It's a longer version of the excellent teaser trailer, the one with the haunting refrain of *I've Got No Strings* from *Pinocchio*, with one major difference:



"And then you kick them in the face..."
Director Joss Whedon talks Scarlett Johansson through her next 76 scenes.



Going underground: Agent Coulson (Clark Gregg, fifth from left) and his S.H.I.E.L.D. buddies suffer tough times.



MEANWHILE, ON TV...

A SPY HARDER

THEY'VE CLIMBED OUT OF THE RUBBLE, BUT NOW THINGS ARE GETTING REALLY FREAKY FOR THOSE AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D....

MARVEL'S AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D. WAS, UNTIL recently, a show about a super-secret organisation. So we should not be surprised by the intense secrecy we find on set. We cannot, for example, tell you precisely where it's being shot. And we have been joined by a very imposing gentleman, who takes the actors aside before they talk to *Empire*, briefing them on what can and can't be said about storylines.

It's understandable, as so far the bombshells have been bigger than ever. If *Agent Carter* (see page 60) concerns the birth of the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division, *Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.* has more recently been charting its death and difficult rebirth. Since the show's shaky start in 2013, writer-producers Jed Whedon,

it ends with a shot of the seemingly impossible, Cap's unbreakable shield broken in two. Pull back to find a horrified Stark, surrounded by the bodies of his fallen comrades.

Ultron will be pleased.

"I fucking kill them," laughs Whedon, when *Empire* mentions that shot. "All of them. I do it. Marvel don't even realise it. When they see the final cut, they'll be like, 'Ohmigod! What are we going to do for Phase 3? We literally have no-one! Except Ant-Man!' They're going to be so pissed."

Relax, merchandise manufacturers. The shot is actually a vision, as revealed to Stark by Scarlet Witch, of a possible future where the Avengers are dead at the hands of Thanos, the big bloke with the purple face who showed up in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. "I can neither confirm nor deny that it totally is," says Whedon, nodding vigorously.

It does raise an interesting point about how to maintain dramatic tension within a movie like this. We know, for example, that Stark and Rogers make it past the finishing line here; that Thor will

stick around for his own movie in 2017. It seems unlikely that Marvel, which has been reluctant thus far to bump off key characters and keep them bumped off for more than five minutes, will suddenly start culling Avengers (Renner, whose Hawkeye, according to Downey Jr., is "super-central" this time, but who would surely be top of any potential victims list, laughs at the idea — "They're not going to be killing any main Avengers off!"), but one thing Whedon and Feige promise is upheaval. Do not expect the Avengers team at the film's end to be the same as the one at its beginning. Not only will there be additions, most likely in the form of Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, Don Cheadle's War Machine and Paul Bettany's mysterious Vision (who appears to be J.A.R.V.I.S. made flesh, though no-one will either confirm or deny this), but there will be departures too.

"At the end of the day, it is the nature of the Avengers that the roster is ridiculously unstable," says Whedon. "It's not like the Fantastic Four — the Avengers changed their roster in issue 2. I'm not exaggerating." ↗

about the changes wrought by the fallout. "When we started the season, we kept going back to the word 'evolution'. 'Who will I become?' 'What will I become?' Coulson has this alien stuff in him; what will happen? That's something we've been playing with."

On TV, Marvel is extending its tendrils even further than Hydra, looking to compete with the successful DC Comics shows (*Arrow*, *The Flash*) by also launching a set of series on Netflix that will introduce street-level heroes Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Iron Fist and Daredevil. For now, Coulson and co. remain the primary link to the movies. But, the show has to work on its own merits. "A lot of people say, 'When are we going to get Iron Man and Thor stepping in?'" says Gregg. "But [the producers] didn't want this show to be, 'Let's go see who the latest guest star is.' They wanted you to care about the main characters. And that's kind of what they've accomplished: it's there to tell a story, not to be a stunt." JAMES WHITE

MARVEL'S AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D. RETURNS TO CHANNEL 7 THIS MARCH.

He's not. The second issue, which came out in November 1963, saw the Hulk leave the team, while Ant-Man had already upgraded himself to Giant-Man. Captain America didn't join until issue 4. The Avengers, since then, have always been mutable. So if Whedon, who's always railed slightly against his reputation (earned as the creator of shows like *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly* and *Angel*) as a serial killer of beloved characters, can't quite get his wish to kill Avengers, he will likely scatter the Big Four of Thor, Hulk, Captain America and Iron Man to the four winds.

"The hook for me with the first movie was about building a community," he explains. "The second movie's about tearing it apart. I wanted there to be more of a challenge, with different opinions about the Avengers. Not everybody is loving the Avengers in this movie."

And the next movie? That might

"JOSS IS THE ULTIMATE AVENGER."

AARON TAYLOR-JOHNSON

not be Whedon's problem. On the three occasions *Empire* speaks to him, he's jovial and quick-witted but also exhausted, drained by the demands of long shooting days and long rewriting nights.

"I couldn't imagine doing this again," he says, when we last speak. "It's enormously hard, and it will be, by then, a good five years since I created anything that was completely my own. So it's very doubtful that I would take on the two-part *Infinity War* movie that would eat up the next four years of my life. I obviously still want to be a part of the Marvel Universe — I love these guys — but it ain't easy. This year has been more like running three shows than any year of my life. It is bonkers." No wonder he wanted to kill the Avengers. He wanted to get them before they got him.

If Whedon does go, Feige will have a plan, and that plan is very likely to involve the Russo brothers, who directed *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and are currently prepping *Civil War* for an April

ROCKS OF AGES

THE GEOLOGY OF CINEMA



AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON (2015)

TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION (2014)

AGE OF UPRISING: THE LEGEND OF MICHAEL KOHLHAAS (2013)

AGE OF HEROES (2011)

THE AGE OF STUPID (2009)

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE (1993)

AGE OF CONSENT (1969)

AGE OF ILLUSIONS (1965)

AGE OF INDISCRETION (1935)

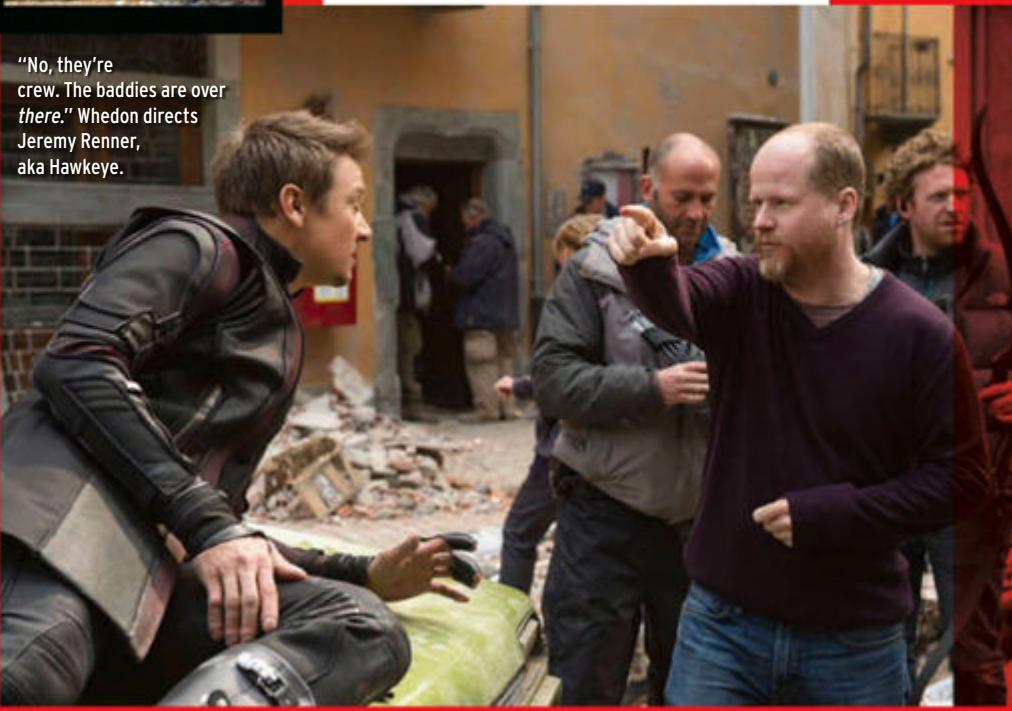
start. But Whedon — one of the nicest guys in Hollywood, don't forget (ask anyone) — will be missed. Few can harness an ensemble like him. Fewer still can write dialogue like him. Evans calls him "the amazingly gifted Joss Whedon". Hemsworth also waxes lyrical about him: "It baffles me how anyone can pull this off, but if anyone can, it's Joss." Taylor-Johnson calls him "the ultimate Avenger. He's a little bit Iron Man, a little bit Hulk, a little bit Cap, a little bit Black Widow." Downey Jr., being Downey Jr., refuses to say he'll miss him. "After so many years, by force of habit, you become mildly sociopathic," says Downey. "To say I would miss him would be to say I'm not capable of divorcing my deep feelings! But I think it's important for Joss to take all the leverage he's earned and to apply it to something else. He's a creator." So go create, is the message.

Yet, if Whedon is wavering about making the call, he could do worse than take a cue from his own movie. "At the end of the day, I feel that this movie, more than anything else, is all about how we all have a certain amount of power, and whether or not damage control is what we do with that power is kind of up to us after a certain point," he says. "Some people make it out the other side and become more than the sum of their parts. Some people don't get that far. That's the meat of the thing."

He laughs, and leans back again on the back legs of his chair. "I, unfortunately, am more like Ultron."

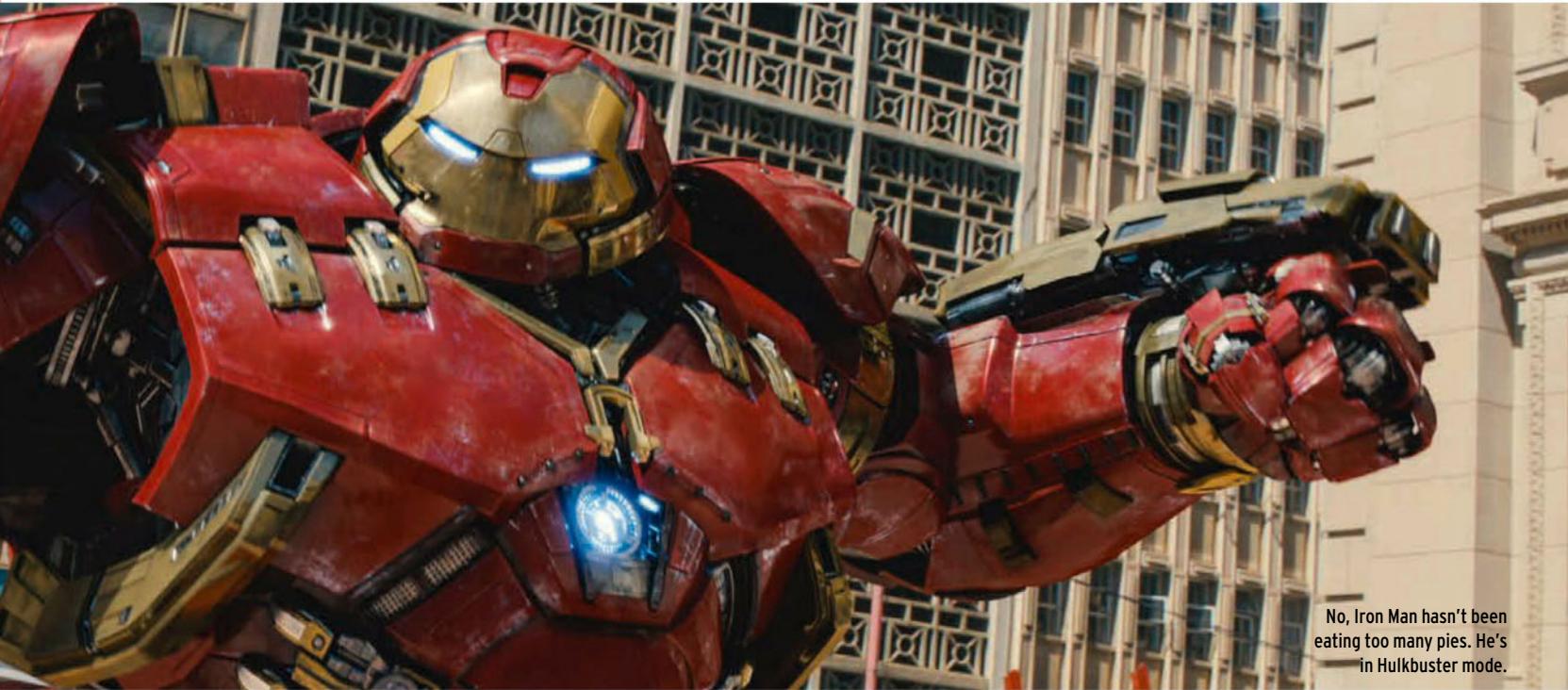
AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON IS OUT APRIL 23 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

"No, they're crew. The baddies are over there." Whedon directs Jeremy Renner, aka Hawkeye.





Natasha 'Black Widow' Romanoff returns her hairstyle to the 'Avengers bob'.



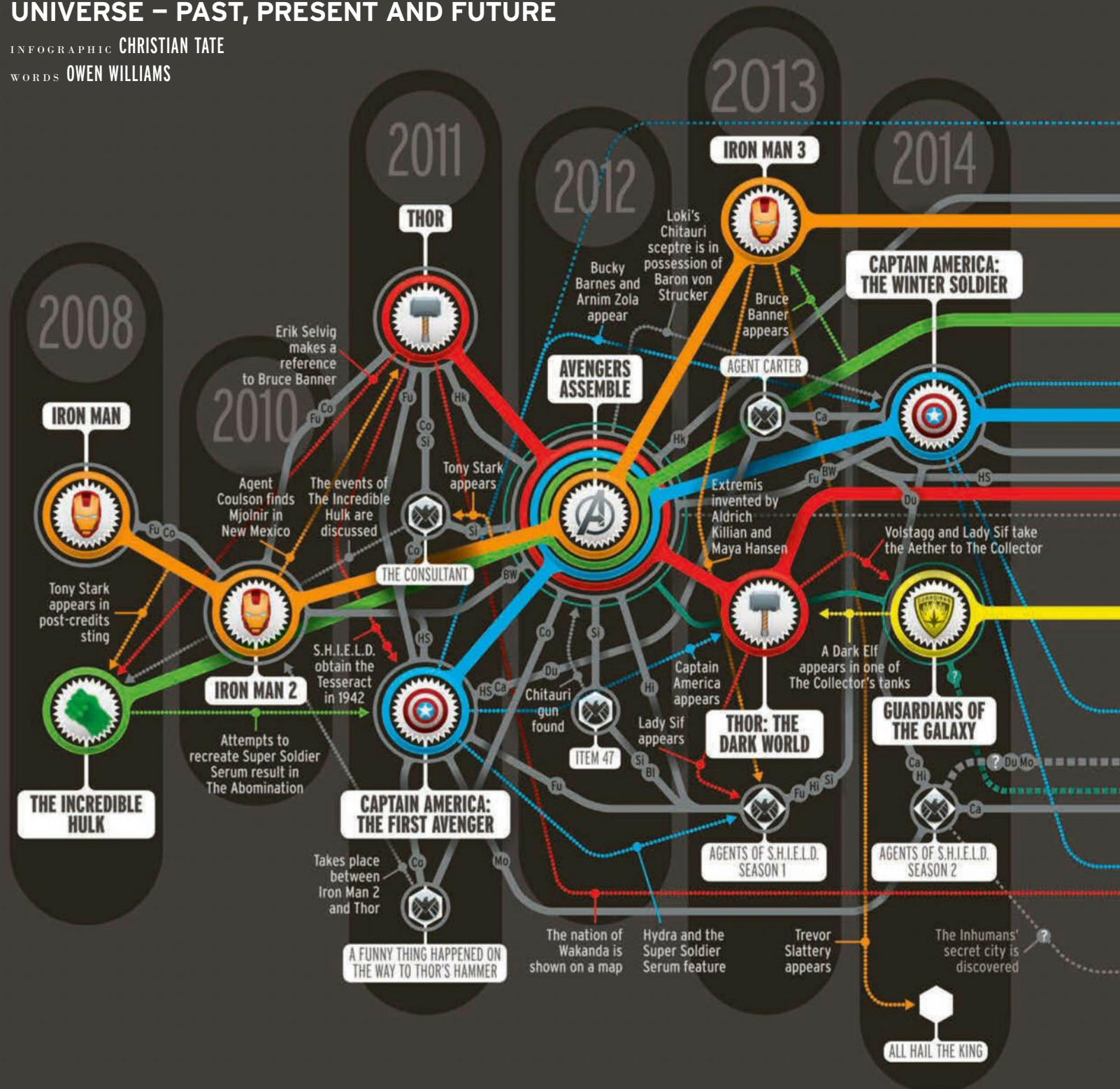
No, Iron Man hasn't been eating too many pies. He's in Hulkbuster mode.

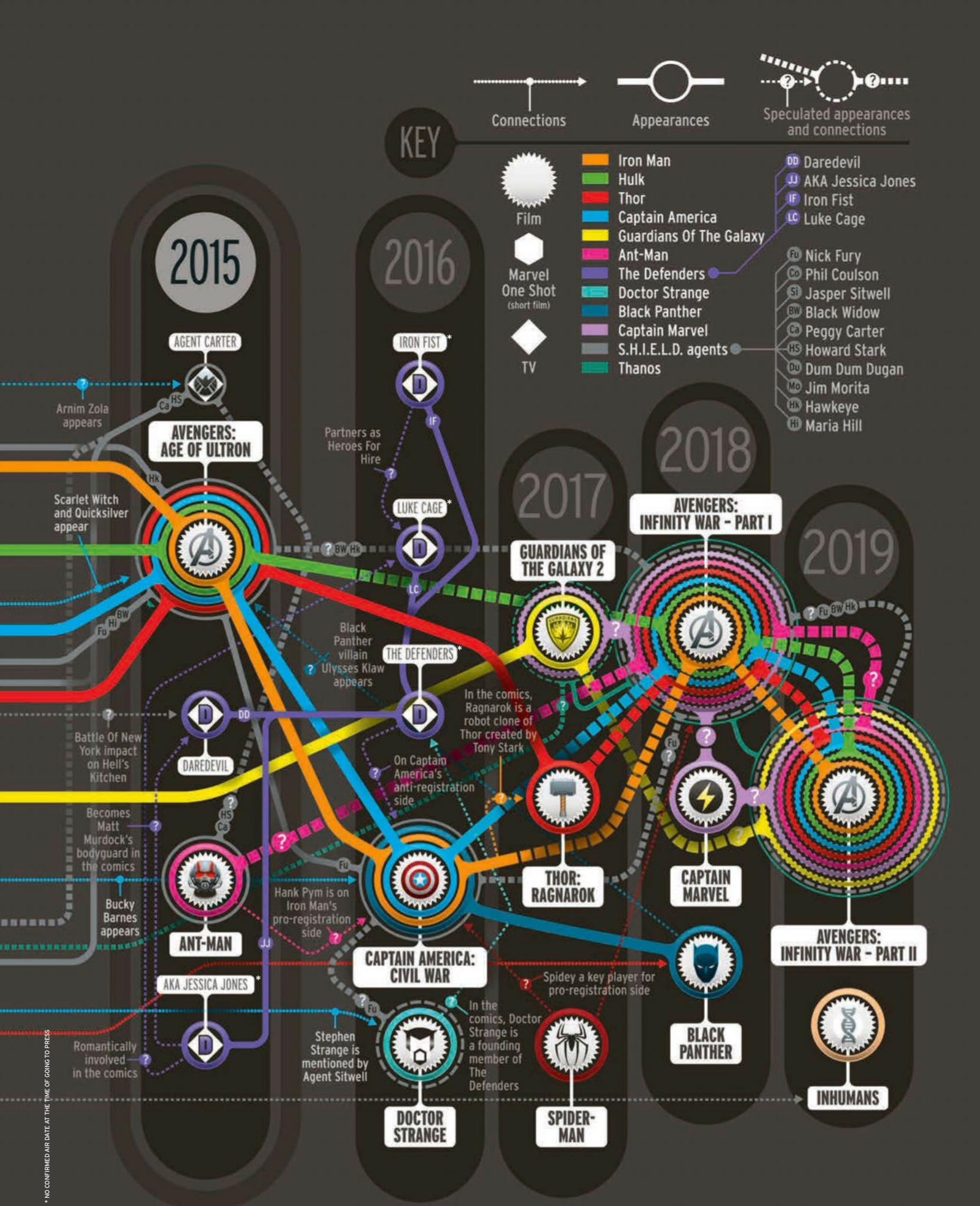
A THE THOR-Y OF EVERYTHING

JOINING THE DOTS OF THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

INFOGRAPHIC CHRISTIAN TATE

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS





VELOCITY



AS THE FAST & FURIOUS SERIES HITS ITS SEVENTH,
SPECTACULAR CAR-SMASHING CHAPTER, ITS STARS
REVEAL HOW A MODEST 2001 CRIME THRILLER
SPAWNED SUCH A MASSIVE, UNSTOPPABLE FRANCHISE

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

RAPTURE



A

merican muscle cars, sporty imports, trucks, planes, tanks... In the *Fast & Furious* franchise, to date there hasn't been much room for golf carts. Yet right now it is the vehicle of choice for that franchise's wheelman, Vin Diesel. *Empire* is squished next to the star, pootling around the Universal Studios lot in LA as he shares his thoughts on an unfeasible success story.

Universal is now on the seventh instalment of a movie series that began in 2001 with a trifling \$38 million budget and a low-stakes narrative about

Californian street-racing crooks and the cop who infiltrates their gang. This month's *Fast & Furious 7* features a sequence where Vin Diesel jumps a \$3 million Lykan HyperSport between the upper storeys of a pair of skyscrapers. So far the franchise has earned north of \$2 billion dollars worldwide, and remains unstoppable, even following the tragic death of co-principal Paul Walker midway through part seven's production (see page 77). So, how the hell did we get here?

"It's a good question," growls the past, present and likely future Dominic Toretto as we bimble down Lon Chaney Drive towards Main Street. "You get to chapter seven having spent multiple films trying to one-up the last one. You have an audience that expects some incredible feats and impossibilities. You have the films dovetail and speak to one another, as opposed to the old way of sequels, which was to create something independent of what went before and just slap on the brand. And you listen to the fans being vocal about not wanting us to stop... That's how we got here, I think!"

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS
The iconic Toyota Supra V Ferrari trial race that started it all.

BRIEFING

FAST & FURIOUS 7

RELEASED: April 2
DIRECTOR: James Wan
STARRING: Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham, Michelle Rodriguez, Tyrese Gibson, Kurt Russell, Ludacris
STORY: Deckard Shaw (Statham) has vowed to get revenge for the death of his brother Owen (Luke Evans) in *Fast & Furious 6* – and Dominic Toretto (Diesel) and his crew are in the firing line.
LOOK OUT FOR A CAMEO BY...
Australian rap-diva Iggy Azalea. She'll play "the head of this monster truck crew of people," she says.

TO LOCATE THE origin of this juggernaut, we need to back up to May 1998, when an article in *Vibe* magazine caught the eye of *Dragonheart* director Rob Cohen. Kenneth Li's 'Racer X' exposed an underground culture of street racers abandoning muscle cars in favour of "tricking out low-buck Japanese imports like Honda Civics and Acura



up-front about essentially being a refitted *Point Break*, substituting cars for surfboards. It was simply the perfect structure, he says “for the audience to uncover this culture as our main character did. Then the next piece of the puzzle was the role of Dom. Somebody tipped me off about Vin. It was clear just sitting with him that he was going to be a huge star. He was already a huge star in his own mind!”

Starting out as *Redline*, the film briefly went by the inadvisable title *Race Wars* before Moritz caught a documentary about B-movie maestro Roger Corman and decided a Corman title was just what was needed. Corman traded the rights (to his 1955 *The Fast And The Furious* in exchange for “a small payment and some stock footage”, and the rest is history. “It was a small movie and nobody involved knew what we really had until the first test screening,” Moritz reminisces. “I walked outside afterwards and kids were ripping around the parking lot in their cars. I was like, ‘I think we’ve got something here...’”

BACK ON THE

golf cart, Diesel and *Empire* swing around a corner and encounter Moritz. “Look, there’s Neal,” says Diesel. “Hey Neal, remember the guy from *Empire* you spoke to last week? I’m telling him how stubborn you were after the first *Fast & Furious* when I told you not to make another one!”

The Fast And The Furious more than quintupled its budget in ticket sales and, in the US, outgrossed Jerry Bruckheimer’s far glossier car-crime yarn *Gone In 60 Seconds* of the previous summer. As a business decision for Universal, a sequel was inevitable, but creatively the road to future *Fasts* was far from clear. Diesel and Cohen chose instead to follow their surprise success with the extreme-sports thriller *xXx*. Moritz stayed with his team to produce *xXx*, but continued to 2 *Fast 2 Furious* (2003) with Walker alone. John Singleton directed, drafting in Tyrese Gibson and Chris ‘Ludacris’ Bridges for another undercover street-racing mission. “It feels like a smaller movie now, but it was big at the time,” Bridges reflects. “Singleton gave a little urban edge to it.”

“I did not like the script of 2 *Fast*,” Diesel admits, “and Rob didn’t like it either, so neither of us wanted to do it. But it wasn’t just that. At that time I felt like the way to ruin a classic was to sequelise it. It was a matter of integrity, ultimately. And I didn’t like 2 *Fast 2 Furious* as the title: of course not. Are you joking? Really, guys, this is a serious movie, not a clown show!”

Commercially at least, neither party made the wrong decision, with *xXx* raking in \$277 million and 2 *Fast 2 Furious* outgrossing its predecessor by



FAST & FURIOUS 5
Dwayne Johnson makes his *Fast* debut and makes Vin Diesel furious.



FAST & FURIOUS
Vin Diesel and Michelle Rodriguez take the stunts up a gear.

\$30 million. Yet the future of the *Fast* franchise was far from set, and none of the original or new cast members would return for the third instalment.

Enter director Justin Lin and screenwriter Chris Morgan, during a time of flux when Universal was considering making the property an anthology series of unrelated episodes. Responding to an open call for story pitches, Morgan weighed in with an idea about Dom

Toretto in Tokyo. "My idea was that Dom has a certain way of driving and something happens in Tokyo and he has to go there and learn a new style of racing," he explains. "It's on the wrong side of the road; it's not about being fast; it's about being precise."

With Diesel still uninterested, this was not feasible, but with notes from the studio about incorporating a high school angle, Morgan nevertheless grabbed the gig and got to keep his new location. The result was 2006's *Tokyo Drift*, starring Lucas Black, who finally returns to the franchise in part seven. Lin says the challenge "was

the culture of making the movie. By then, *Fast & Furious* had come to mean something so specific that my job was to change the sensibility of the franchise and find some mythology."

IN UNIVERSAL'S EYES,

key to that mythology was Toretto, and therefore Diesel. With the film already completed, Diesel was convinced at some expense to return for a final-scene cameo. "I felt weird about bringing Dom back in a script that wasn't catered [for him]," says Diesel. "I felt weird about doing four hours' worth of work, and then the world thinking that I'm in a movie, when really I'm not."

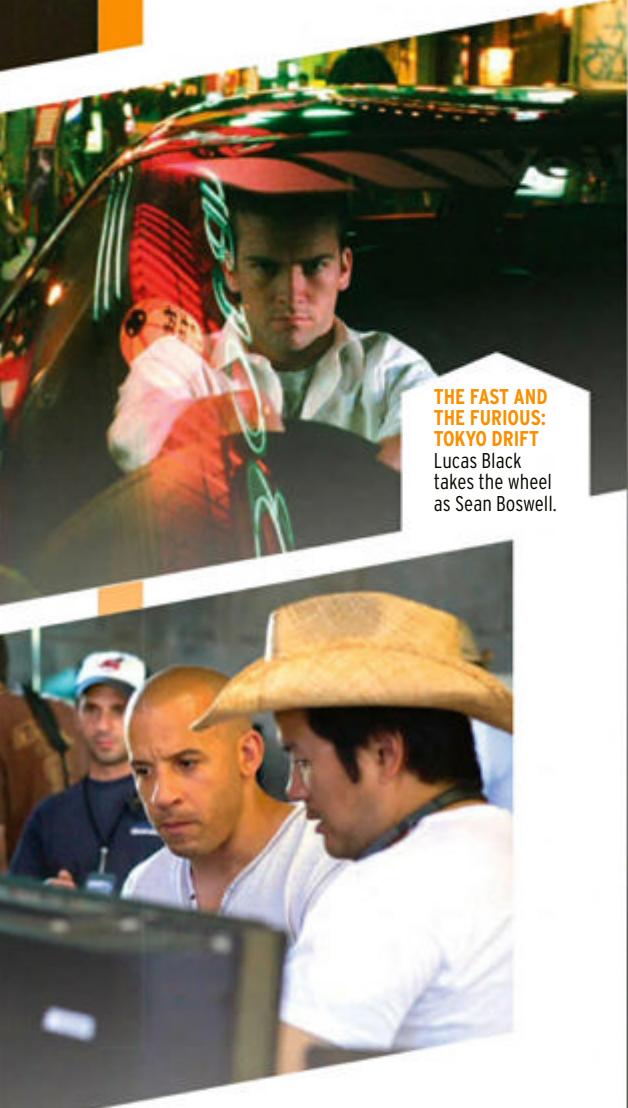
The "offer he couldn't refuse", however (Diesel's words, spoken in a Godfather voice), specified returning his rights to the stalled Riddick franchise and making him a producer on any future *Fast* instalments with a say in their creative direction.

"Universal were very clever," he explains. "They thought *Tokyo Drift* would go straight to DVD, but they still felt there was *something* there. They brought me back to be the saga visionary, in a way. We didn't put a number on the fourth one because it was a new beginning, and it was the first time we ended on a cliffhanger. That made it very clear to the world that these stories and characters were evolving and we would pick up where we left off."

With Diesel joining Moritz behind the scenes, and Morgan and Lin staying on to



FAST & FURIOUS
Justin Lin collaborates with his leads Diesel and Walker.



shape the *Fast & Furious* future, the franchise began to take the form that we now recognise. Original cast members Walker, Jordana Brewster and Michelle Rodriguez were drafted back in, but crucially, characters from the sequels who had previously not met each other were also folded into the ongoing continuity: Lin half-jokingly describes the resultant ensemble vibe as “the action equivalent of a Robert Altman movie”, although it caused headaches where *Tokyo Drift* was concerned: audiences only recently learned that the third film actually takes place after the sixth.

“That was so much fun,” Diesel laughs. “It was such a nice pop when we brought Jason Statham in at the end of *Fast 6* [as, we’ll learn in 7, the vengeful older brother of villain Luke Evans] and you realised, ‘Wait a minute, that film I saw 10 years ago with the nondescript white Mercedes... there’s a character in there we need to know?’ People appreciate that.”

MOTOR MADNESS

THE FAST & FURIOUS FRANCHISE'S SEVEN MOST INSANE STUNTS, IN ASCENDING ORDER OF WTF-NESS...

7 THE CHARGER SMASH

(*THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS*, 2001)
In the first film's climactic drag race, following an airborne near-miss with a train, Dom's Dodge Charger gets T-boned by a truck, flips and sails sideways over Brian's Toyota Supra.



6 THE BOAT JUMP

(*2 FAST 2 FURIOUS*, 2003)
Old-school jumping with a bit of CG enhancement: Brian hurls his '69 Chevy Camaro an unlikely distance off the road and onto a passing trawler.



5 FREEWAY FLYING

(*FAST & FURIOUS 6*, 2013)
On a Spanish freeway, Hobbs flies from his Mustang just as it's pulverised by a tank, while slightly later Dom saves Letty with some unlikely mid-air physics.



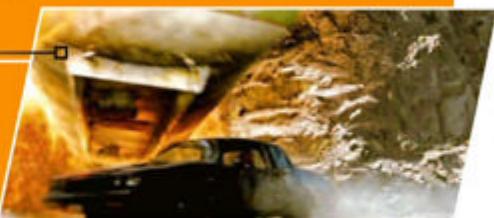
4 'SAFE' DRIVING

(*FAST & FURIOUS 5*, 2011)
Brian and Dom career through the streets of Rio with a massive metal safe suspended between their twin Dodge Chargers. Destruction is liberally forthcoming.



3 TANKER CHICKEN

(*FAST & FURIOUS*, 2009)
Caught between the edge of a cliff and a barrel-rolling burning oil tanker, Dom and Letty choose to stay on the road and squeak their Buick narrowly underneath the spinning inferno.



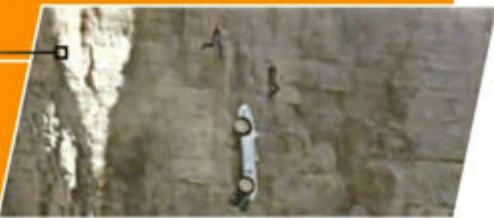
2 THE RUNWAY ROLL

(*FAST & FURIOUS 6*, 2013)
Dom jumps a Dodge Charger out of the nose of an exploding plane, flipping it half a dozen times when he hits the Tarmac. 'Tis but a scratch!



1 THE CHASM PLUMMET

(*FAST & FURIOUS 5*, 2011)
The spiffy RCR GT40 replica first exits a moving train through an exploding hole in its side and then does a *Thelma & Louise* into a deep gorge with Brian and Dom free-falling behind.



FAST AMONG SEQUELS

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS ISN'T THE ONLY B-PIC TO SPAWN AN UNLIKELY FRANCHISE...

CARRY ON SERGEANT (1958)

This should have been the *Whiplash* of 1958, as overbearing sergeant William Hartnell bullies conscripted incompetents into becoming a crack platoon. But supporting comic turns took it in a very different direction, leading to 30 spin-offs.



EMMANUELLE (1974)

This posh smut was one of few subtitled films to get a circuit release in the '70s... For much the same reason as *Fifty Shades Of Grey*. The sexual awakening of Sylvia Kristel gave rise to six follow-ups, dozens of cable TV fillers and the *Black Emanuelle* series.



FRIDAY THE 13TH (1980)

The 1978 success of *Halloween* inspired dozens of low-budget slashers. And you wouldn't pick *Friday The 13th* as likely to inspire so many sequels – down to a 2015 reboot which will be the 13th. The series didn't even hit on its formula until *Part II*...



PUPPET MASTER (1989)

A modest 1989 horror film from the video rental era, *Puppet Master* has somehow managed to produce 10 sequels, often reusing footage from the first film, including series crossover *Puppet Master Vs. Demonic Toys*.



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL (2003)

Studios used to greet pirate pitches with shudders after various commercial flops, and if it weren't based on a Disney ride, Gore Verbinski's probably wouldn't have been greenlit, let alone become a tentpole franchise.

KIM NEWMAN



WHILE 2009'S FAST

& Furious was the nominal new start, all concerned agree *Fast & Furious 5* (2011) was the real reboot, widening out to an international heist-thriller plot and dropping in Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson as the Toretto-targeting Diplomatic Security Service agent Luke Hobbs.

"That part was written specifically for Dwayne," Morgan says. "We wrote a role we hoped he wouldn't be able to resist, and he just got it immediately. It's fun to watch the one-upmanship between him and Vin on screen. These movies being PG-13, curse words are valuable currency. When he says, 'Stay the fuck out of my way!' in his first scene, you're like, 'Wooooh! Yeah, I like this guy!'"

With the opening salvo of *Fast & Furious 5* a spectacular prison-bus escape, the canvas immediately stretched wider, while the climactic carnage around Rio brought a new level of automotive madness to the proceedings. *Fast & Furious 6* (2013), still with Lin at the helm, continued in similar fashion, taking the action to London where Evans's gang employs ramp-nosed race-cars that flip oncoming traffic and Spain where a tank smashes along a freeway and our heroes perform some gravity-defying acrobatics.

"I'm well aware these films don't necessarily adhere to the laws of physics," says *Fast & Furious 7* director James Wan, who joins the franchise after steering a few of his own (*Saw*, *Insidious*, *The Conjuring*) in a very different genre. "The franchise plays within its own set of rules and lives within its own style. People talk about the runway in *Fast 6* all the time [by Empire's calculations at least 43.5 kilometres long], and it's part taking the piss out of it, but at the same time lovingly embracing it. This new movie has a lot of action set-pieces that are really bananas!"

Wan likens replacing Lin after four films to arriving at a family Thanksgiving dinner late when you don't know anyone and they've already carved the turkey. "At first I'm awkwardly looking around going, 'Hey guys, do you have a seat for me?' but after a couple of glasses of wine you're part of the family — whether you like it or not!"



THAT WORD, "FAMILY",

is the one that crops up most with the crew. While the stunts are important, there must be a reason why rival franchises (*Gone In 60 Seconds*, *Death Race*, *Need For Speed*) have broken down while *Fast & Furious* has continued to rev ever bigger engines.

For Diesel, Lin, Wan, Moritz, Morgan and everyone else, it's the ensemble. "We called Justin Lin 'The Zen Master,'" says Gibson. "How is it possible to have all these stars in one movie and have them all feel like they're still in the show, and everyone's ego stays contained? When James came on, a lot of those insecurities kicked in... He was only just getting to know us during what was the toughest shoot of all, because of the tragedy of what happened to our brother Paul. But he looked out for us by any means necessary."

"The characters are classic blue-collar superheroes," reflects Wan. "The kind of drama and pathos and big action beats



they go through in part seven is no different than you'd expect from Marvel." It's an apt comparison. Universe-building and end-credits tags are now Marvel traits, but the *Fast* franchise was doing both first.

Our golf-cart jaunt is coming to an end: Diesel has declined to drive us all the way to LAX. But will the road go on for the franchise? Morgan and Moritz say there are various ideas, but no firm plans.

"It's the most important question that remains unanswered," Diesel winks. "With this movie, because of its sacred nature, the right thing to do is to end with no expectations... I'm the first person to get excited about teaser endings, but... this one would be a little complicated."

And with that, Diesel drops us at Gate 2 and bids us farewell, waving to a studio tour as he rattles off down James Stewart Avenue. You wouldn't call him furious, but he does drive that thing pretty damn fast.

FAST & FURIOUS 7 IS OUT ON APRIL 2 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.



"IT WAS ALMOST INSURMOUNTABLE..."

HOW FAST & FURIOUS 7 NARROWLY SURVIVED PAUL WALKER'S TRAGIC DEATH

PAUL WALKER'S SUDDEN DEATH in a road accident on November 30, 2013, left *Fast & Furious 7*, then in mid-shoot, on the precipice. Reports vary as to how much of the film he'd completed. "Let's just say we had a fair way to go," says director James Wan.

Time was needed for cast and crew to process the shock, and the production was temporarily closed down. "Thank God all of us in this movie are actually family," says Tyrese Gibson. "We're not just here for cheques and politics and bullshit. If we weren't so close, it would've taken that much longer to find closure and peace. We'd have never come back."

Once production started up again, however, there were obvious technical challenges to completing the film without one of its lead actors. On set, the role of Brian O'Conner was, in the end, taken by three replacements: Walker's brothers Cody and Caleb, and John

Brotherton, who was already cast as another character and had early been remarked upon as a Walker-alike. "Once we got the idea of what we wanted Paul's character to do, we would shoot it with John and then again with each of the brothers," Wan explains. "It took a lot of people to make up one person."

Then, in post-production, Wan and his editors trawled through every piece of footage of Walker from the last three films, and used "the latest, latest technology that doesn't quite even exist yet" to achieve digital face replacement.

"People every now and then reference *Benjamin Button*," says Wan, "but my VFX people are the first people to point out that that performance was still Brad Pitt, even though it was his digital head combed onto someone else. The fact that we don't have Paul meant that we had to dig much deeper to make it work. It was almost insurmountable."

FAST & MOBILE
Use the free **viewa** app to scan the page and watch the bonkers trailer for *F&F7*.



ONE OF MARVEL'S MOST POPULAR HEROES. U2. THE DIRECTOR OF
THE LION KING STAGE-MUSICAL... WITH THIS KILLER COMBO, HOW
THE HELL DID SPIDER-MAN: TURN OFF THE DARK BECOME
BROADWAY'S BIGGEST-EVER FLOP?

WORDS ADAM SMITH

OVERTURE

One day during the Spring of 2002, an Irish impresario by the name of Tony Adams took a call from New York's Marvel Comics, the venerable purveyor of finest quality superhero stories since 1961. Marvel, on the cusp of its recent transformation into a multimedia giant and then basking in the outrageous success of Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* movie, was looking for ways to further capitalise on its property's newly invigorated popularity.

But much would happen in the way of turmoil and catastrophe over the decade that followed. There would be deaths and hospitalisations and accidents and sackings and fights and amputations and lawsuits, and staggering amounts of cash would be lost forever...

ACT 1: HUBRIS

"It's not like we were involved in anything criminal," sighs co-writer Glen Berger. "I mean, all we were doing was trying to put on a play."

It is late January 2014 and *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark* has finally taken its terminal curtain call. *Empire* detects in Berger's voice a sense of sadness mixed with relief; the kind of weary emotion evoked after a long-ailing family pet is finally put out of its misery. "[On closing night] I was trying to figure out, not just from a career point of view, but from a very cosmic point of view... what was that? What was that all about?"

There have been other Broadway disasters, more than a few of them rooted in the movies (see sidebar, page 87). But while these examples were short-lived, *Turn Off The Dark* was a high-visibility fiasco enacted over years: a car crash played out in the most ultra-slow motion such that every new misfortune could be dissected by connoisseurs of the artistic epic fail.

The whole sorry saga truly begins not with Marvel, but in the boardroom of The Walt Disney Company during the early '90s, when Disney chief Michael Eisner decided to extend the brand to the New York stage. The studio began with *Beauty And The Beast*, and then, crucially, *The Lion King*, which Julie Taymor, a director well-known for her visually innovative productions of Shakespeare but a virtual stranger to the commercial demands of Broadway, was hired to direct.

During the production, Taymor worked under the strict management of Disney's creative executives. When she proposed blending puppets with human actors, a daring idea that she finally pulled off triumphantly, the Disney bosses flew in for a presentation before they would give their blessing. The finished musical was a powerful expression of Taymor's artistic vision, but it was made in the service of a corporate property and under the close, nervous supervision of the corporation in question.

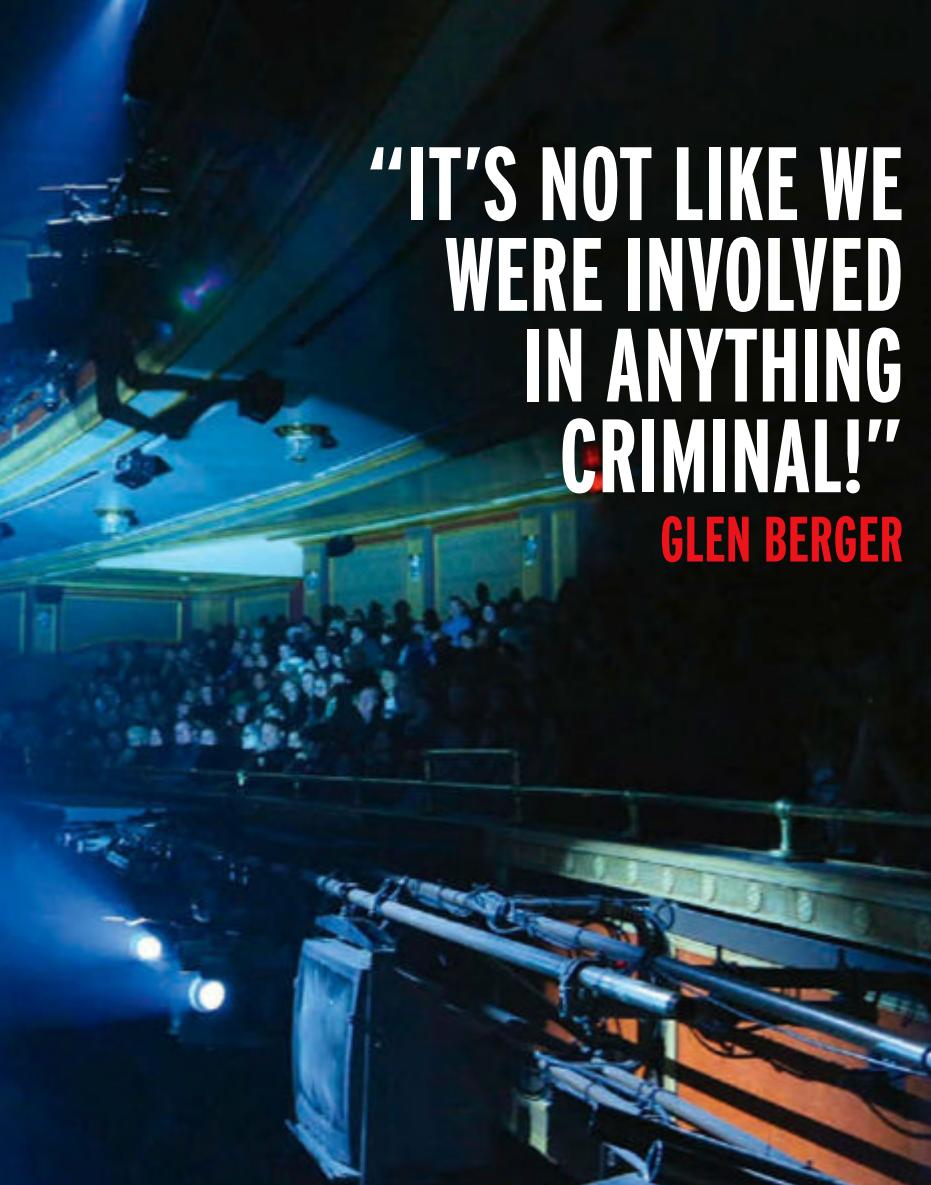
Almost entirely the opposite would be true of *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark* (with which Disney had no involvement). It is difficult to find anyone involved in its conception with much more than passing previous interest in the character, let alone the kind of fan devotion that had been key to the franchise's recent celluloid rebirth (Sam Raimi's movie adaptation was, he told *Empire* at the time, the fulfilment of a lifetime's ambition). Nevertheless, the highly visible success of the Disney project hung over Spider-Man from the start. "It was never a sense that we needed to top it or that Julie had



Reeve Carney doing whatever a spider can on September 15, 2013, his final bow.



Bono and The Edge at the show's opening on June 14, 2011.



"IT'S NOT LIKE WE WERE INVOLVED IN ANYTHING CRIMINAL!"

GLEN BERGER



Left: Patrick Page as Norman Osborn/the Green Goblin celebrates the show's first anniversary on November 27, 2011.

Below: *New York Post* critic Michael Riedel.

Bottom: *Turn Off The Dark* co-writer Glen Berger.

to make lightning strike twice," recalls Berger. "It was more damaging in the sense that, well, she did it before so of course she'll do it again."

The seeds of *Turn Off The Dark*'s ultimate failure were sown very early on during the creative process. When Tony Adams approached her, Taymor was unsure she could find anything in the story that would fire her artistic curiosity. So she ordered up a stack of *Spider-Man* comic books. And there, in a few panels of a 1984 edition, was the first appearance of a character called Arachne.

In the comics, Arachne is a government-created female superhero of subsequently fluid allegiances. She is a minor character in the Marvel pantheon. But in Ancient Greek mythology, of which Taymor is an enthusiastic student, Arachne is a human weaver of great talent who is cursed by the goddess Athena to become a spider, and forever spin beautiful webs. Now, this was more like it! This played to Taymor's conception of herself as, above anything else, an artist. ("All art, all the time," is a common refrain from people who have worked with her.)

The stage play she conceived, and which Berger wrote, dispenses with the familiar origin story of Peter Parker in the first act, which climaxes with a spectacular aerial battle and the early demise of Spider-Man's arch-foe, the Green Goblin. It then introduces a newly imagined Arachne, a kind of phantasmagorical dream-weaver who at first creates Spider-Man as a work of art and then becomes insanely jealous of him, as the key villain in the second act. (Granted, this is just one reading of Act Two, which by most accounts was virtually indecipherable.)

The heart of the story was not the magnified anxieties and wish fulfillments of a teenage boy, but of the eternal plight of the artist, and arguably by extension Taymor herself. Imagine explaining this to a 12-year-old Spider-Man fan and you get a feel for what a profoundly misconceived idea it is.

It was hardly like nobody noticed. Neil Jordan fled the project precisely because of Taymor's insistence on placing Arachne at the centre of the show. At early creative meetings at Bono's house in the South of France, matters came to a head. "I thought she was out of her mind," Jordan is reported as saying. "She kept going on about this Arachne thing. I thought, 'This is insane, it's just a comic book,' and so I said, 'Look, this isn't for me.'"

With Jordan gone, Taymor cast around for another writer and found Berger. It took a while for him to drink the Arachne Kool-Aid but finally he quaffed deeply. "There's no question that if you're working with her it's going to be a Julie Taymor project," he says. "This was not going to be a Glen Berger script. It was going to be a Julie Taymor script that I would try as hard as I could to render. I suppose there are many different flavours of collaboration..."

Someone entirely resistant to the idea was Avi Arad, then Marvel's Chief Creative Officer. "The concept is entirely wrong," he wrote in a stinging memo. "The tone of the treatment, which is quite dark, is not what Marvel anticipated receiving at all." He ended with an ultimatum: "Get rid of Arachne and we're in business." Taymor was apparently girding herself for a fight. "If Arachne goes, I go!" she asserted. But in the end, no battle materialised. Arad left Marvel to form his own production company. As of then, Marvel's involvement in the conception of the show was distant and limited mainly to an expression of concern about sexual innuendo. It had lost, arguably, its most important voice.

Turn Off The Dark's problems had so far been invisible. But things were about to get very public indeed. Enter, stage left, *New York Post* theatre critic Michael Riedel. If Arachne wasn't a convincing enough villain for *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark*, Riedel was going to fill the role admirably.

ACT 2: NEMESIS

To say that Riedel is a polarising, love-him-or-hate-him figure in the industry doesn't quite capture his reputation. Before his arrival, coverage of Broadway had become a somewhat genteel affair; shows were reviewed when producers decided they were ready and gossip stayed, for the most part, in the dressing room. Riedel changed all that, re-injecting a tabloid attitude, an irreverent tone and an unslakable thirst for backstage drama.

The continued chaos at the Foxwoods Theatre, where *Turn Off The Dark* was located, was, for him, manna from heaven. When one employee of the show begged him to leave them alone he was pitiless in his response. "I've got my boot on the neck of this show," he said. "And I'm having way too much fun to take it off."

It was courtesy of Riedel's relentless coverage that Spider-Man's problems became first a local obsession for New Yorkers and then metastasised into international news. For Berger, Riedel would personify the malign forces he felt were raging against his and Julie Taymor's vision. "He was not just some bloodsucking mosquito," Berger wrote later. "He was a parasite-carrying bloodsucking mosquito depositing the larvae of an elephantiasis-causing filarial worm under the skin of our show."

"I've been called worse," Riedel tells *Empire* from the *Positron*'s Avenue Of The Americas offices. "Look, they were incredibly vulnerable and that's when I'm at my best. Sure, I was torturing them."

Riedel had at first heard rumours that the production's budget was running out of control in mid-2007, but soon the story mushroomed into something much more entertaining and gossip-worthy.

"I knew it was going to be something bigger when a source of mine tipped me off to the first injury, which was when a kid did one of the stunts during a ticket sales presentation and he broke both of his wrists when he landed. A friend of mine heard the crack. I ran that in the paper and it got picked up all over the place and then I was able to brand the show as not only being a financial catastrophe but also a danger to the actors themselves."

"Michael Riedel reported that this was going to be a very expensive production," remembers Berger. "And we were all, 'Okay, well, that's going to be the narrative for this one.' That would have been the only story, which would have been fine if we hadn't run out of money three months later. For several months it really did appear as if the thing wasn't going to happen, and it was during those months that Michael Riedel and the *NYP* really started covering our woes. This was before anyone knew what the script was, before anyone had heard the music. All they knew was that there was this huge ship which was potentially going to go down before it left the dock."

Disaster piled upon disaster, and they started early and close to home. The most tragic catastrophe to hit *Turn Off The Dark* took place in The Edge's Manhattan apartment. In mid-October 2005, Tony Adams, the human dynamo who had pulled the original deal together, had arrived to sign the final contracts tying the musicians to the project. That chore completed, The Edge went to the kitchen to get something suitably fizzy and expensive from the fridge to celebrate. When he came back, Adams was lying on the floor unconscious. Two days later he was dead; the victim of a massive stroke. He was 52. At an early stage the production lost its driving force and his undoubted expertise, both in raising money and in keeping volatile artistic types in check.

"Tony was able to control all those crazy types because he had worked with Blake Edwards and Peter Sellers for years," says Riedel. "I think he would have been able to rein Julie in a bit. He could handle these personalities."

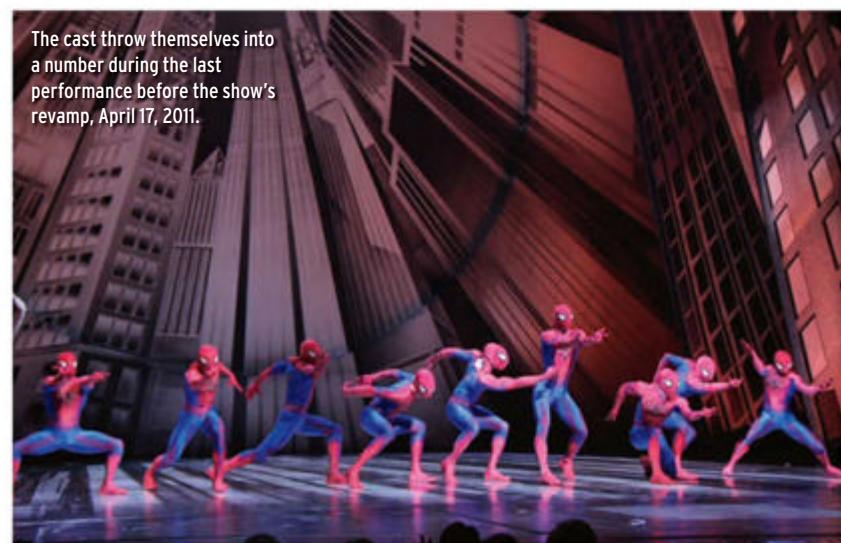
Only weeks after the production had finally moved into the Foxwoods Theatre, on which it had spent millions of dollars to



T.V. Carpio as the ill-fated Arachne. She replaced Natalie Mendoza after Mendoza was injured during a preview.



Director Julie Taymor at the show's first night, June 14, 2011.



The cast throw themselves into a number during the last performance before the show's revamp, April 17, 2011.



The Green Goblin and Spider-Man fight above the audience after the show resumed in May 2011.

"MONEY WAS FLYING ALL OVER THE PLACE!"

MICHAEL RIEDEL



Opening night at the Foxwoods Theatre, Broadway – which later appeared in *Birdman*!

make room for the state-of-the-art flying rigs (which would require 34 individual computer-controlled winches and bespoke software in order to swing the dozen or so stunt performers at speeds touching 80kph), it emerged that the \$25 million budget that Adams's replacement had assured Taymor was in place was, in fact, non-existent. In mid-August 2009, all work ceased and the Foxwoods Theatre went dark. It would remain that way for nearly seven months.

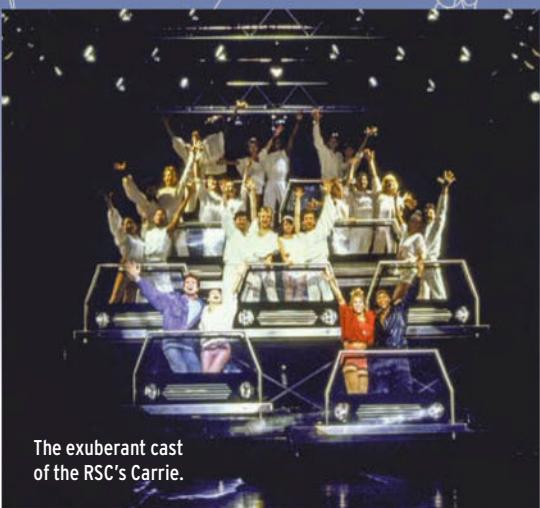
Bono and The Edge noted with alarm that this thing was beginning to stink of incompetence and failure, two things with which the pair were unfamiliar and which they had no intention of embracing. Bono finally hit pay dirt when he put in a call to Michael Cohl, a seasoned concert promoter with whom U2 had collaborated, and who had pretty much reinvented the world rock tour. Cohl came by the theatre, looked at the books, promptly declared the show bankrupt and set about raising more money.

But the hiatus simply threw fuel on the rumours that the show was a disaster of entertainingly gargantuan proportions. By now it was the talk of the town, and not in a good way. At the Tony Awards, Broadway's Oscars, host Neil Patrick Harris told as many *Turn Off The Dark* gags as he could in 30 seconds ("I sent Bono a congratulatory cable, it broke... Julie Taymor knew it was all over when she found the head of War Horse in her bed..."). An invitation to a swish charity do at the Lincoln Center had, engraved in copper plate at the bottom: "NO DISCUSSION OF SPIDER-MAN ALLOWED."

Then there were the accidents. Injuries are not unusual on Broadway shows, but they were a distressingly frequent occurrence on *Spider-Man*. Natalie Mendoza, who played Arachne, was concussed by wayward equipment, and subsequently left the show. Another actor was slammed into the stage in an apparent homage to the first incident and sustained a broken foot. Stuntman Christopher Tierney fell 10 metres onto the concrete floor of the orchestra pit after a safety line was not properly fixed, fracturing his skull and shoulder blade and breaking four ribs and three vertebrae.

After yet another dancer was carted off to hospital, Stephen Colbert joshed that the musical had been retitled *Spider-Man: Notify Next Of Kin*. *The New Yorker* ran with a cover illustration of a hospital ward full of convalescing Spideys. As recently as August 2013 a dancer became trapped in the onstage lift resulting in multiple operations and the amputation of much of his right foot, resulting in yet another multi-million-dollar lawsuit against the production. Observers speculated that entire legal

GONE-OFF BROADWAY



The exuberant cast of the RSC's *Carrie*.

CARRIE (1988)

Bizarrely, this take on Stephen King's bestseller was co-produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed by no less than its co-artistic chief Terry Hands. Despite negative reviews and various on-stage technical problems, it transferred to Broadway for the then unimaginable sum of \$8 million... And closed after only five performances.

NICK & NORA (1991)

Inspired by the Dashiell Hammett novel *The Thin Man* – which inspired six films during the '30s and '40s – this was a musical version of the adventures of high-society detective couple Nick and Nora Charles. Featuring a sequence in which a chorus-line kicked a corpse downstage, it closed to vitriolic reviews after nine performances, despite rewrites and cast changes during its 71 previews.

TURN OFF THE DARK FOLLOWS A LONG TRADITION OF MOVIE-RELATED BROADWAY FLOPS...

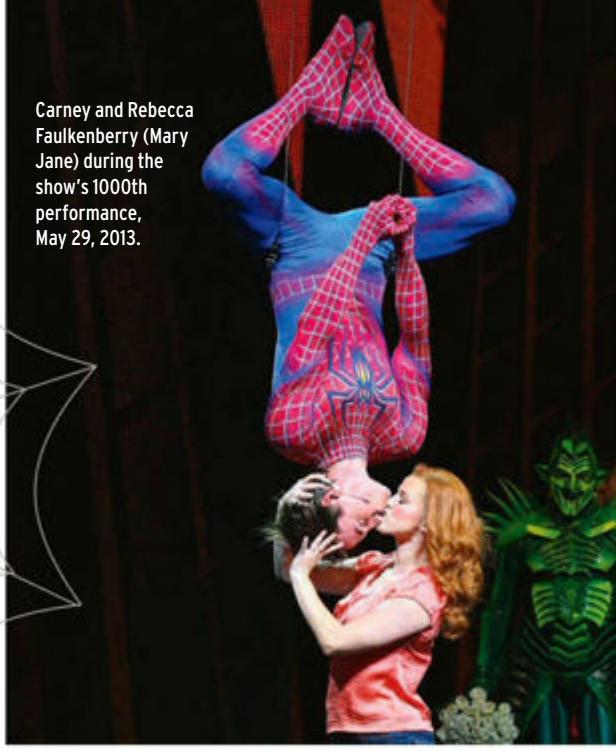
THE RED SHOES (1993)

Bob Merrill, Jule Styne and Marsha Norman's re-work of the 1948 Powell and Pressburger masterpiece suffered a string of firings during production, with producer Martin Starger yanking the director, the lead actor and several other performers during its 51 previews. Eventually it opened, then closed after five performances.

BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S (1996)

Edward Albee and (again) Bob Merrill's 1996 adaptation of the Blake Edwards box-office smash starred Mary Tyler Moore and Richard Chamberlain, but proved so irredeemably awful that producer David Merrick announced, after a mere four previews, that "rather than subject the theatre-going public to an excruciatingly boring evening" he would close the production immediately.

Carney and Rebecca Faulkenberry (Mary Jane) during the show's 1000th performance, May 29, 2013.



HOW TO TALK LIKE A PRODUCER!

FANCY YOURSELF AS A BROADWAY IMPRESARIO? HERE'S THE LINGO

ANNIE

Any cast member under the age of 14, male or female.

Say: "Hey, Annie, I don't care if you're going to be late for wrestling practice, you're going to stay and learn the words to *Officer Krupke!*"

BROADWAY BELTER

A performer with a loud, emotional style. If female, a beltress.

Say: "You wanna see belting?" Sutton Foster in the 1997 *Annie* revival. Now there was a beltress."

I WANT SONG

Number delivered early in the show in which the lead character lists all the things they wish to achieve in the next two and-a-bit hours.

Say: "Lyrically, it's a slog. The I Want is particularly demanding."

THE BUTTON

A final applause-worthy moment in a song.

Say: "The I Want in act one is really soft. You're gonna need a bigger button."

11 O'CLOCK NUMBER

Late song in which the lead character explains how most of what they listed in the I Want Song has either been achieved or that they don't want it anymore.

Say: "The 11 o'clock number felt like it happened sometime after midnight."

EFFIE, WE ALL GOT PAIN

Phrase used in response to complaints. A reference to the 1981 musical *Dreamgirls*.

Say: "I know the beltress is down with the flu and we've been in previews longer than *Spider-Man* but Effie, we all got pain."

critics chorused, "Bugger it we're reviewing," and descended en masse. The results weren't pretty.

"The sheer ineptitude of this show loses its shock value early," wrote *The New York Times'* Ben Brantley. "After 15 or 20 minutes, the central question you keep asking yourself is likely to change from 'How can \$65 million look so cheap?' to 'How long before I'm out of here?'" This, though, is positively kittenish when compared with *New York* magazine, whose Scott Brown opined that the experience was "savage and deeply confusing — a boiling cancer-scape of living pain."

"It was just dreadful," remembers Riedel. "A pretentious hodgepodge of Julie's crazy, rather juvenile readings of Greek mythology. She ladled on all this Greek mythology and her view of what it means to be a hero and an artist and all, that kind of stuff. She convinced herself that she found these themes in the comic book itself."

That the show was fundamentally broken was now indubitable. Questionnaires given out to audience members, much to Taymor's disgust, just proved what everybody already knew. Arachne and the confusing second act were choking off the goodwill built up during the more conventional opening. Things finally came to a head in Spring 2011. "Michael Cohl had come to put the pieces back together, and he knew how to handle Julie. And that was by firing her," says Riedel bluntly.

Taymor left, to be replaced by Phil McKinley who shut the show down and retooled it, virtually eliminating Arachne. Though the changes cleared up much of the confusion that bedevilled the second act, the alterations were not transformative. "I guess it was a bit clearer," shrugs Riedel.

FINAL CURTAIN

Possibly the most striking aspect of this spectacular Broadway flop is how much money it took along the way. During the Christmas week of 2011 it grossed \$2.9 million, an all-time Broadway record. But financially it could never overcome those millions spent in development. At the beginning of 2014, with running costs of more than a million a week and ticket sales sinking towards half that, Michael Cohl announced the show's closure. At the final performance the cast, past and present, took their curtain calls, but neither Julie Taymor nor Bono or The Edge were mentioned or present. "They had pretty much moved on," says Riedel. "I think it was embarrassing for them."

Michael Cohl has promised that the show will be resurrected in some form or another, perhaps in Vegas, though no-one is holding their breath. "It's the biggest flop ever, nothing else comes close," says Riedel of the show's legacy. "I don't think they really know how much they've lost. The money was flying all over the place. I don't think \$75 million is out of the question."

For its last few weeks, *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark* had run virtually without incident. But, halfway through act one of its very final performance, a small technical hitch forced a stagehand to run on and fix the door handle to the Green Goblin's metamorphosis machine during a musical number, thereby preventing it from trapping the actor within. It was a moment freighted with symbolic meaning of the kind that might appeal to Julie Taymor. It was as if the show's essential nature, what by then was its perversely appealing brokenness, was taking centre stage and taking a final bow.

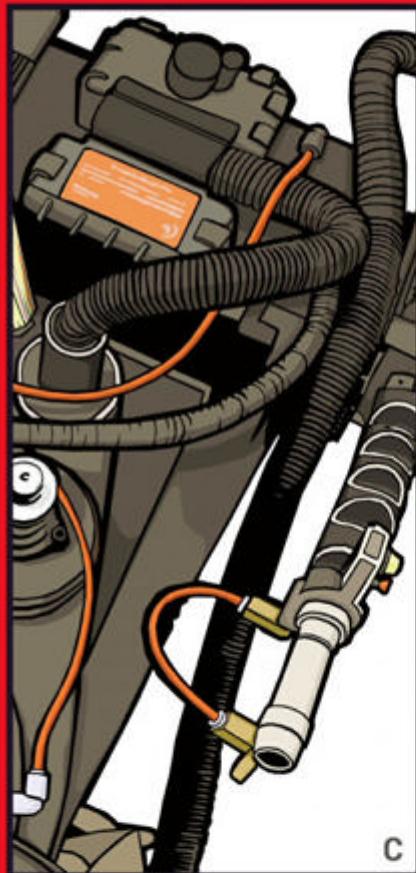
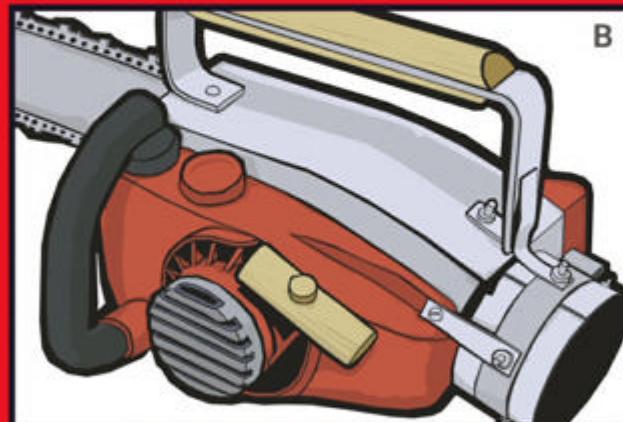
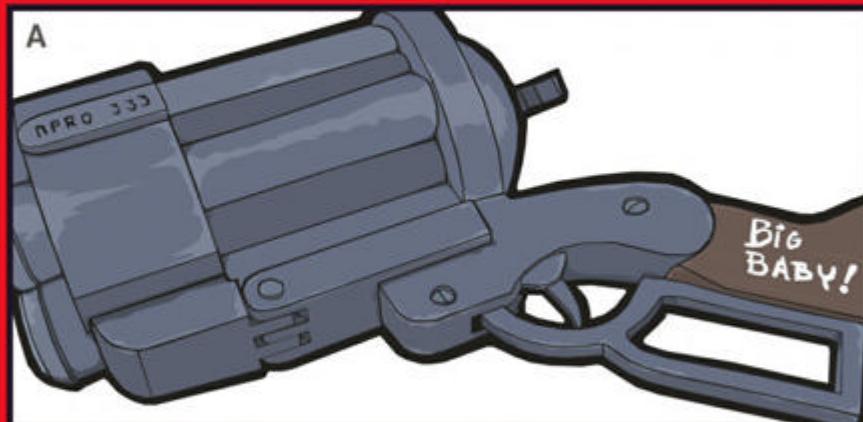
And the audience roared.

GLEN BERGER'S ENTERTAINING ACCOUNT, *SONG OF SPIDER-MAN*, PUBLISHED BY SIMON & SCHUSTER, IS AVAILABLE NOW.

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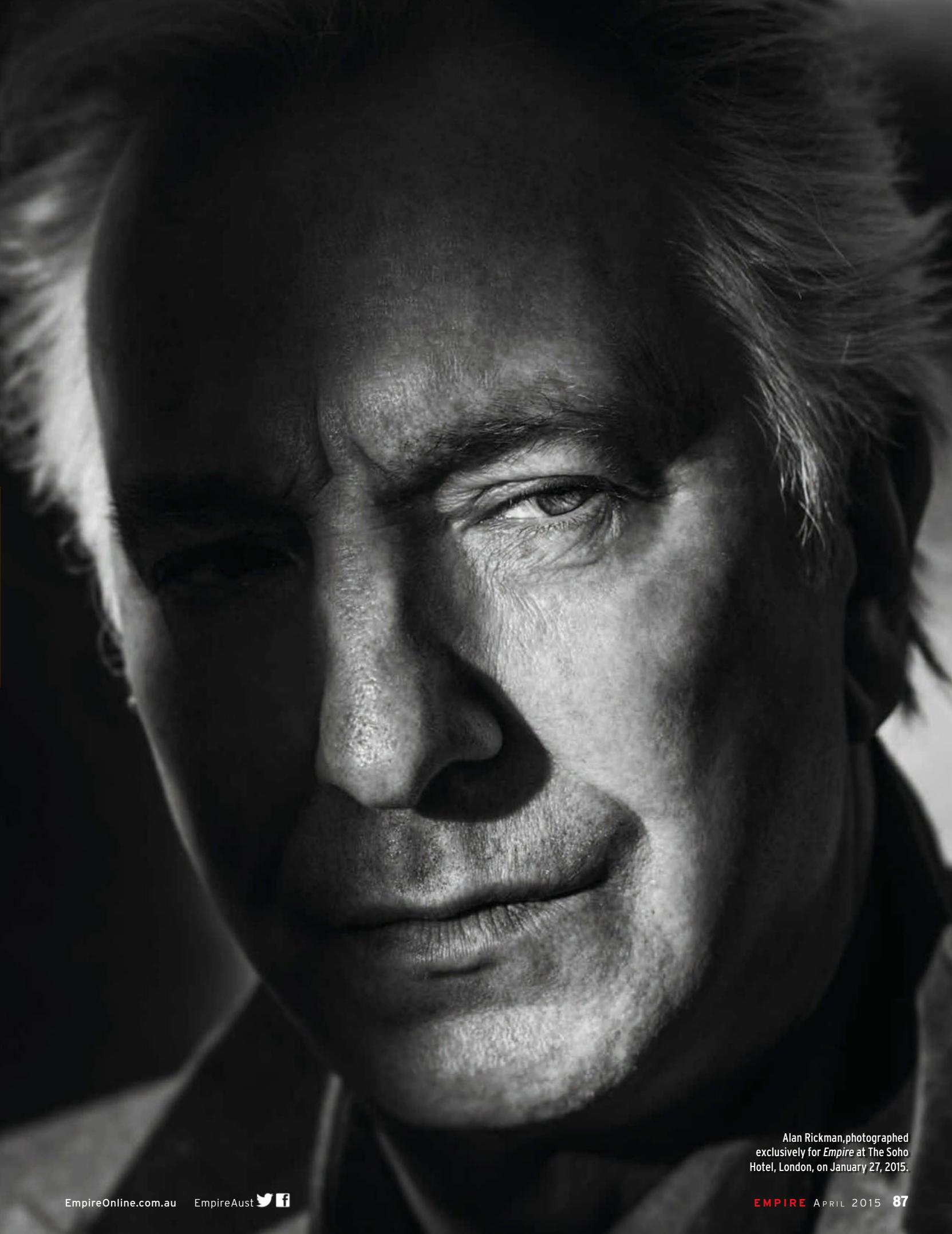
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= *the EMPIRE interview* =

RICKMAN

BEST KNOWN FOR BIG BAD-GUY ROLES, THERE IS MORE TO ALAN RICKMAN THAN YOU MAY THINK, WHETHER IT'S ACTING ON ONE LEG IN *DIE HARD* OR DIRECTING KATE WINSLET IN *A LITTLE CHAOS*

WORDS NEV PIERCE PORTRAITS SARAH DUNN



Alan Rickman, photographed
exclusively for Empire at The Soho
Hotel, London, on January 27, 2015.

He'll cut your heart out with a spoon, shoot you in cold blood and cast a spell as withering as his glare...

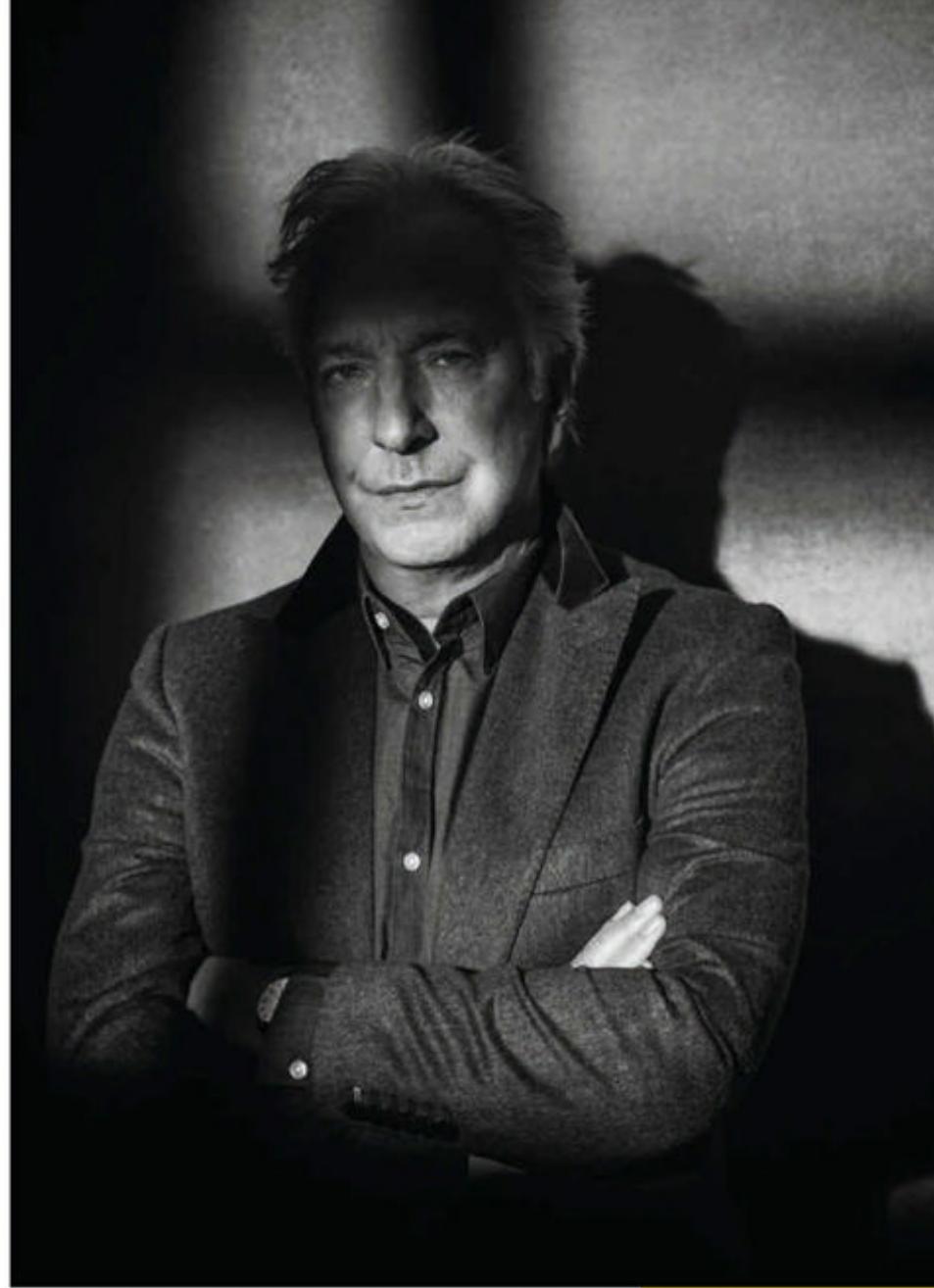
At least, that's the shorthand depiction of Alan Rickman. But there's a lot more to the 68-year-old star of *Die Hard*, *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves* and the *Harry Potter* juggernaut than these pop cultural highlights.

He made his indelible screen debut after electrifying audiences in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* on Broadway and has continually cultivated his first love, theatre, even as he has become a consistent screen presence, able to be sinister but also slyly funny. With his six-foot stature, piercing eyes and, as every interview is obliged to mention, *that voice* (sonorous and seductive, like a post-coital Shere Khan), he can appear imposing, intimidating even. But in person he is a warm, engaging man. He sees himself in all his characters, but if you picked one to match his real self it would be the compassionate suitor Colonel Brandon in *Sense And Sensibility* rather than *Die Hard*'s mastermind criminal Hans Gruber.

He is returning to our screens this month as King Louis XIV in *A Little Chaos*, though he took the part reluctantly, to help ensure the production of his second film as director, after 1997's *The Winter Guest*. Like that picture this deals in part with grief, while also touching on love, ambition and how we can attempt to escape the expectations the world has for us. The story centres around Sabine De Barra (Kate Winslet), one of the gardeners tasked with constructing Louis's gardens at Versailles. It's a thoughtful and honest film, not unlike the man himself.

Is this the second film you've wanted to make, or the second you've been *able* to make?

Mostly able, because when I started *Harry Potter* — not that that took over the whole of my life — Jo Rowling had only written three books and so I didn't know how long I was going with it.



If you're gonna direct a movie, you've gotta know that you've got over a year free.

Do you feel people underestimate how consuming directing is, especially trying to look calm when there's a lot of pressure?

I've learned, having been on a lot of sets, the good news is that by definition you are surrounded by experts. They get fired if they're not — unlike in the theatre! The first film that Anthony Minghella shot was *Truly, Madly, Deeply* and I remember he gathered the crew and the cast together, on the very first day, and he said, "I have one word: help!" I'll always say, "What do you think?" Then you choose. You have to ask for opinions. I said to my First A.D. [assistant director] on *A Little Chaos*, "If you ever see me about to screw up or do something stupid, for God's sake tell me!" So that made it a bit easier.

What was the appeal of *A Little Chaos*?

There was always a sort of freshness to the dialogue that made me kind of jump with its *newness*. And then as time went on, I became more and more aware that this was written by a woman [*Alison Deegan*]. Because, although there are three names on the screenplay, Jeremy [*Brock*] and I really were putting plaster between the bricks or rearranging the bricks. The film is about what it is to be a woman who cannot have a professional life in a world that's totally male-dominated. And then it had to be very

NOTES

① Rickman portrayed the suitor to Winslet's flighty Dashwood sister in Ang Lee's English-language debut, written by co-star Emma Thompson.

② A comedic serial-killer thriller written by *Doubt* playwright John Patrick Shanley, and starring Kevin Kline and Rickman's *Prince Of Thieves* co-star, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio.



As Louis XIV with
Kate Winslet's
Sabine De Barra in
A Little Chaos.



Removing the wig and
stepping behind the lens
for his second feature.



As 1988's *Die Hard* German
terrorist baddie, Hans Gruber.



Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves: The dastardly
dashing Sheriff Of Nottingham with
Mortianna (the late Geraldine McEwan).

much fed and watered by Kate, who did a phenomenal amount of research. And then I was able to say, "What do you think?" But, interestingly enough, she said once, "I'm not used to being asked my opinion." I thought, "Well, there's a parallel."

That's fascinating, and quite sad.

Very. Because she's so smart. It's a loss to any director that just sort of moves her around like a Kate Winslet Object.

Have you and Kate stayed in touch since *Sense And Sensibility*? ¹

On and off, but both of our lives are like that... Kate went to live in New York for a long time. There's sort of pogo-stick meetings.

Going back to the beginning of your screen career, was it important that your success with *Die Hard* came when you were 42 and not, say, 22?

Well, it *felt* like being a kid. I was in Hollywood, with all that that means. It was exciting and as time has borne out, that script wasn't stupid. Stupider films have been made trying to be it since.

It's genuinely witty and every black character is strong in it.

Had it long been your ambition to break into movies?

I never expected to have any kind of film career, to be honest. It was all a bit of a surprise. But I was in a big hit play on Broadway. America, as many people will say, says yes more often than [*the British*] do. And so I was suddenly surrounded by people saying yes. But I was aware that was 'cause of what I was in. It had a big impact. Then this big adventure started. I was coming from a very cerebral, dark, difficult, layered play by Christopher Hampton and doing an action movie in Hollywood [*Die Hard*] with explosions, and I was holding a gun.

How did it feel to have that most iconic of action movies as your big-screen debut?

At the time, I kind of thought, "What the fuck am I doing?" That gave me an innocence that was good. And it was exciting just to be in that world. But at the same time, it was a bit of, "I honestly don't know where this fits into any sort of shape. But, oh well, just better go with it." All I knew was that I could only take my theatre experience to the job, and John McTiernan [*the director*] said fairly early on, "I've learned with you I've gotta be ready for the first take." I didn't know what take two, three, four and five and six were all about. We've just done it! But of course, he hadn't got his lights right or he hadn't got his camera moves right, or whatever. I knew nothing about any of that. Plus, I thought I had ripped a ligament on the very first shot. Turned out I'd torn a cartilage, but I knew enough to go downstairs and see the doctor. I said, "I think I heard something crack in my knee." I was jumping down from a small ledge. He said, "You may have torn a ligament. If you have, you're out of action for six months." I hadn't even shot a scene! I was still in my costume, and I said, "Could you pull the trouser leg down over that splint thing?" I went back up to the 33rd floor and carried on shooting. But the doctor said, "Don't put any weight on that leg!"

Which scene were you shooting?

[*The one*] where Bruce Willis and I meet and I'm producing an American accent. Then I produce a gun. I'm playing that scene standing on one leg! [Laughs] Nobody knows, but that's what I'm doing! The next morning, they drew off this fluid

and it was the appropriate colour to say that it was a cartilage and therefore, you know, you'll recover. There's a shape you're gonna have to your career and then there's what really happens. I thought I was out of a job.

After *Die Hard* and *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves*, was a lot of your power in saying no to similar stuff?

Those two just happened to have a huge impact, one way or another. But somewhere in there I made — and have continued to do — films that disappear without a trace. You still care about them. So there's the public agenda and there's the private one. And the private one is certainly more important in a way because that's what my life is made up of. So while I was doing that, I'd also done *Closet Land*, which I should think almost nobody saw. And then I worked with Pat O'Conner on *The January Man* ². *Truly, Madly, Deeply* was in there somewhere. *And Close My Eyes*. So, you know, from my point of view, it was all quite mixed.

Is it fair to say that you didn't take easy cheques?

Well, yeah... There's, like, marks next to an actor's name or something, and boy does that go up and down! Somewhere in



“I never expected to have any kind of film career, to be honest. It was all a bit of a surprise.”

there, which always causes my mate Miss Ruby Wax great hilarity, I was offered a biopic of Frank Sinatra. Even *I* knew that was a bad idea! They'll throw anything at you at certain times. So, you know, to thine own self be true.

What was it like returning repeatedly to a character on screen, with *Harry Potter*'s Professor Snape?

It was like being in an army camp, because the pressure on the producers was so intense. They had a clipboard for the stuff they had to hit every day. And sometimes there were 300 children on set. So you have to understand what you're in the middle of. And it's a military campaign to get the adult actors there, 'cause half of us were doing something else at the time. I don't know how they got us all there. But over the course of, what, 10, 12 years? Not only were there different directors, but also inevitably the kids got older. You were watching them grow up. Also, the CGI was getting more and more sophisticated, so whereas at the beginning we'd be off on a location, by the end we were in a pile of shitty old grass out the back of Leavesden with a football stadium of lights. There was a whole crew standing around not quite knowing what to do when Ralph [Fiennes] and I filmed our last scene, because basically it was down to a couple of actors acting. We never knew what was

gonna be put in around us, 'cause they could do it so beautifully by the end. So that kept you interested.

Did it help that Snape is one of the series' strongest characters?

I suppose my character's story was so complicated, in among others that weren't in that way. So there was that to guard, helped by the fact that whenever you showed up you'd button yourself into the hundreds of buttons and put the black contact lenses in and then on would go the wig. Something happens to you when you have a very strong costume. You go inward. Those characters in *Harry Potter* are not lived through three dimensions. They are who they are. They each have a very strong outline. So it helps if the costume is in many ways that outline.

In terms of films that are important to you, but not as well known, what stands out?

Snow Cake is a lovely film. Really proud of that. We shot it in 21 days. I thought Sigourney was amazing in it ³. And very, very accurate. I think there was some element that thought she had pushed it too far. But not at all when you do the amount of homework she had done and spent the amount of time she did with adult autistics. She was right on the money. And I think



Getting carried away:
Marianne Dashwood
(Kate Winslet) with
Colonel Brandon in
Sense And Sensibility.



Professor Snape
looks on his potions
in wand-erment.

NOTES

③ Weaver depicts an autistic woman who Rickman's character visits to explain the death of her daughter. *Snow Cake* slipped in and out of cinemas in 2006, but you really should seek it out.

④ Rickman played politician Éamon de Valera, crucial to Ireland's struggle for independence from Britain, in Jordan's *Michael Collins*. Newell and Cuarón directed him in the *Harry Potter* series.

⑤ *Sense And Sensibility: The Screenplay And Diaries*, in which Thompson records the making of the film.

⑥ American director of photography Ellen Kuras is best known for shooting *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*.

⑦ Ivan Tverdovsky's film, about the struggle of a special needs student, won the Golden Star from a jury that included Rickman, chaired by Isabelle Huppert.



"A lovely film." *Snow Cake*'s Alex Hughes (Rickman) and Linda (Sigourney Weaver).

Marc Evans is a terrific director. He's a sweet, open, honest man and a really good director of actors.

Are there particular qualities that the best directors share?

I suppose openness. I mean, if you have Mike Newell and Alfonso [Cuarón] here together, boy, would they be two different people. And Ang Lee. Certainly as actors, and maybe as directors, you've got to hang on to something childlike. You've got to know what *play* is. I haven't worked with Mike Leigh, but I know him very well and there's something open in his eyes about what's in front of him. And the same is true of Alfonso in a Mexican, mad way. There's an enthusiastic response to something. Neil Jordan, the same, when he gets excited ④. You just want to know there's a human being in there.

What kind of acting notes do you prefer: very practical or more theoretical and thematic?

It's hard to say. It could be physical, or even practical. Somebody could say, which they had to back in the *Die Hard* days, "Alan, it's a close-up, keep your head still!" Ang Lee — it's in print in Emma's book ⑤ — he gave us unforgettable notes because of his English: "But Alan, be more subtle. Do more." Which one was able then to reinterpret as, "I like that, do more of the subtle

stuff." It really depends on the individual circumstances. It could be something that makes you go deeper, or something that pulls you out of the deep.

How do you find acting under your own direction?

Awful. And I really wouldn't have done it, but it was economics. They didn't have to pay that actor. The only thing that made it bearable was having such a close relationship with Ellen Kuras and travelling in to the set together ⑥. So that we would talk, handing her paper with lists of priorities if I was in the scene.

Do you watch yourself on screen?

Never. It's done. That's how I feel about that. I'm not saying it's wrong for everybody, I probably should be stronger and learn to do it, but I think you start to edit yourself.

Is there a part you've played which feels closest to your true self?

All of them. It's me doing them. So what have I got to draw on, really? I mean, there's the writing and there's the homework, but then it's got to be fed through me. That goes back to trying to figure out who you are anyway. In that you choose this job called an actor. This is what I have to use [*he indicates his body*]. Other people can pick up the violin or something. I've got this and it's fallible. Looking back now... It's 27 years since *Die Hard*, so it's a lot of looking back over and figuring out, "Who's this person that keeps getting dressed up and made to be other people?" But you're always drawing on yourself somehow, whether you stick a wig on or an accent. It's my taste and my imagination, I suppose.

Is there any particular director you would single out as your biggest inspiration?

It's a hard question to answer specifically because, I mean, it would be "round up the usual suspects" in many ways. I was just on the jury of the Marrakesh Film Festival. And we watched 15 films in 10 days. And there were a smart bunch of operators on the rest of the jury, from all over the place. The film that we almost unanimously gave the prize to was *Corrections Class*, which is a first film by a 25-year-old Russian director ⑦. It's alright to have your heroes, but you better be awake to what's going on right now with a new filmmaker. And more and more that's the case with kids being able to practise on YouTube and in school. They've got the equipment to make a movie with something held in your hand. I think one's always impressed by not noticing the work of the director. That is what's impressive about *Birdman*, the fact that although it is very dazzling from a directorial [point of view], I still got completely caught up in the story. In a way, when the lights come down, I just wanna be a child again.

That's a great feeling — that buzz...

What worries me... Not worries me, but... about critics watching a film, is when we showed *A Little Chaos* in Toronto, the response was enormous and visceral and people had really handed themselves over. You could feel the level of silence from 2,000 people was kind of frightening. I just wonder whether critics and journalists ever experience that anymore, because you're watching it at home or in a screening room, and it's with like [minded] people.

Well, if you're not excited by it, should you be doing it?

I always thought about theatre — I'm not sure about film, but certainly in the theatre — if I could press two buttons, first I'd have my lines going across the back of the auditorium, with electric lights — that would calm me down. The other one is all actors should have a T-shirt, whatever the costume, that just says on it, "Believe it or not, I'm doing my best."

A LITTLE CHAOS IS OUT ON MARCH 26 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 48.

BACK STORY





OUR FORGOTTEN STAR

A YOUNG AUSTRALIAN CRACKED GOLDEN AGE HOLLYWOOD, MARRIED A NAZI AND DIED UNKNOWN. WE REMEMBER MARY MAGUIRE

WORDS MICHAEL ADAMS

CATE. NIC. NAOMI. REBEL. ROSE. ISLA. THESE days "our" Aussie actresses are first-name famous, regularly headlining blockbusters that make box-office registers ring and have critics and audiences singing their praises. Each new wave of stars — we're now witnessing the ascendancy of Mia Wasikowska, Margot Robbie and many others — only confirms that there's a clear path from home-grown productions to Hollywood stardom. But this succession of success stories makes it easy to forget that an Australian woman on the American screen was once so rare that it made for breathless news headlines and big nationalist hopes.

In the early days of cinema, a few antipodean ladies had trickled into Tinsel Town via circuitous routes. In 1916 Annette Kellerman parlayed a decade's worth of swimming fame into a silent-movie career. Two decades later May Robson became Australia's first Oscar nominee — a mere fifty years after she'd first trod the boards in Brooklyn. But a rising star like we have today — one that's young and bright and beautiful and bound for big things? We didn't have one of those until Mary Maguire came along. What's amazing is that she's almost completely forgotten today.

It was 80 years ago this month that audiences first got a chance to see the teenager who would rapidly become Australia's sweetheart. In March

1935, pioneering filmmaker Charles Chauvel's historical epic *Heritage* had just won the Commonwealth Film Prize, an early initiative to encourage local productions to compete with American imports. But the big buzz was around its star, credited then as Peggy Maguire, who, at just 15, had been plucked from obscurity. The *Australian Women's Weekly* opined she was our answer to Janet Gaynor, then a huge box-office draw and famed for winning the first-ever Best Actress Oscar. Such talk didn't seem far-fetched. After all, Chauvel's most recent discovery, a Tasmanian chap named Errol Flynn, was right then swashbuckling on the set of *Captain Blood* for Warner Bros.

Maguire seemed set to live up to her promise when, now going by her mother's name Mary, she was cast in 1936's *The Flying Doctor*. While *Heritage* had been a home-grown affair, the new film was a UK-Australian co-production and her leading man was American heartthrob Charles Farrell, a big star famous for the nine hit movies he'd made with... Janet Gaynor. The stars literally seemed to be aligning.

With shooting complete by April 1936, Mary was said to be bound for London to act in films. But soon the newspapers carried even more exciting reports — Australia's sweetheart was bound for Hollywood.



MARY WAS BORN IN MELBOURNE ON FEBRUARY 22, 1919, as Helene Teresa Maguire. Her dad, Michael, was a celebrity in his own right, having been the youngest-ever Australian Rules player signed to Richmond as well as a championship welterweight boxer. After he retired from his sporting career, Mickey and his wife Mary bought a Bourke Street pub and set about having a brood of five beautiful daughters.

By the age of 12, Mary, now a "well-developed ingénue", was performing in pantomimes. "From a young school kid she was infatuated by the movies," says Norman Archibald, Mary's second cousin who has researched her life. "She wagged school to go to the movies." And in late 1932 Mary got a chance to see the other side of the screen when she won a small role in Melbourne-shot comedy *Diggers In Blighty*.

Archibald says Mick loved being known for his sporting achievements — and mother Mary wanted fame and fortune for her girls. The family thrust themselves into the spotlight in early 1933 when they moved to Brisbane and took over the famous Bellevue Hotel. There they hosted the city's social set and even entertained Douglas

Charles Farrell and Mary Maguire in *The Flying Doctor* (1936).



Jardine and his British Bodyline cricket team. It's a fair guess young Peggy would've been hugely excited when the Bellevue held a party for Jocelyn Howarth, the newly famous Sydney actress then about to star in *The Silence Of Dean Maitland*.

Mary's big chance came in 1934 when Chauvel was undertaking a very public search for the female lead of *Heritage*. Accounts vary as to how he found his starlet. "He spotted Mary on the streets of Brisbane," Archibald says. "She was still in her school uniform. He asked her parents whether she could feature in the film." Elsa Chauvel, meanwhile, recalled that her husband had been alerted to "this lovely child" by a Brisbane publicity man. In any event, a contract was signed and Mary was soon on set in Sydney. Cinesound captured Chauvel directing his actress in the art of crying for the screen by making her remember her poor dead pet koala. The sequence, included on the recent *Heritage* DVD release, seems staged for the newsreel. For her part, Mary later claimed it was only after she had been berated as "useless" that she broke into the tears required for the scene.

Whatever the truth, Mary's performance was amateurish at best. But she wasn't the worst offender in a starchy production made stiffer by primitive talkie technology. Despite *Heritage*'s failings, the patriotic depiction of Australian history ensured the film's success, and Mary became a celebrity worthy of endorsing cosmetic and fashion products. It must've been even more head-spinning for her when *Heritage* won the Commonwealth Film Prize, beating out Jocelyn Howarth's *The Silence Of Dean Maitland*.

The Flying Doctor proved a better vehicle for Mary's emerging talent and maturing beauty. She

charmed as the farmer's daughter who's thwarted in love when her groom does a runner on their wedding night. But the bulk of the weirdly plotted film was given over to its American star's random trajectory from Sydney Harbour Bridge painter to professional wrestler to outback prospector.

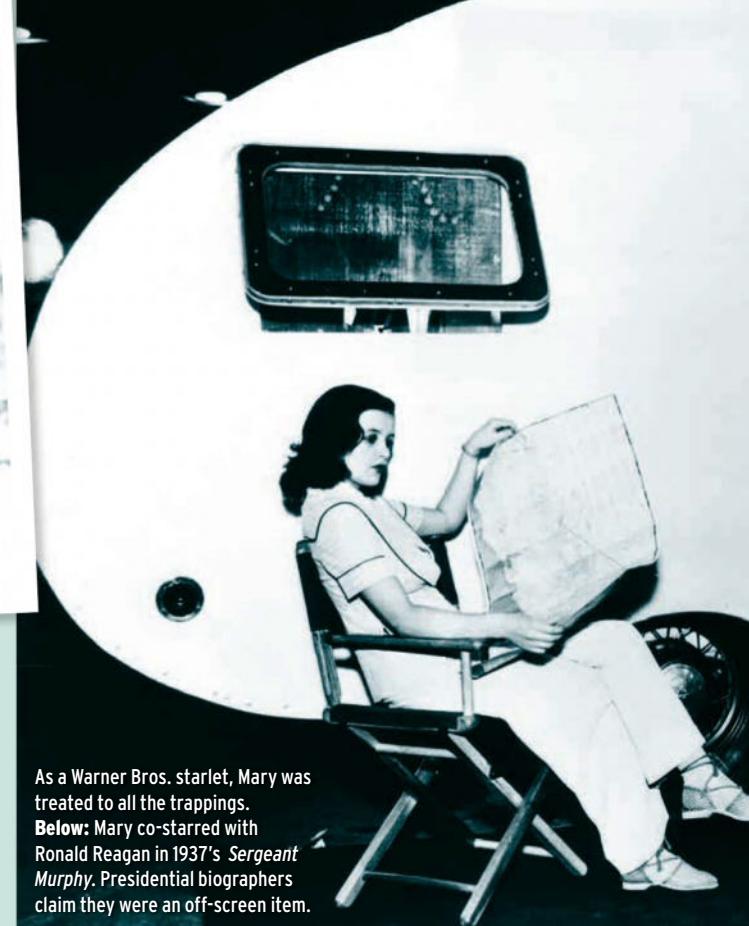
Encouraged by *The Flying Doctor*'s director, British character actor Miles Mander, Mary set sail for Hollywood in August 1936 after receiving word that two studios were interested in her. Upon her arrival in early September, she met with John Farrow, Aussie ex-pat scriptwriter and director then about to marry Maureen O'Sullivan, known to audiences worldwide as Jane from the *Tarzan* films. Farrow arranged the introductions. Within a fortnight, Warner Bros. offered Mary a seven-year contract starting at US\$500 per week.

"We are going to change her name and her coiffure," a studio sales manager told the *Courier-Mail*. "We may also change the colour of her hair. She will receive the special training given to all Hollywood recruits."

But while Jocelyn Howarth had recently lucked into a Hollywood contract as "Constance Worth", Mary engaged in what one newspaper dubbed "the battle of the century" to stop Warners changing her name to "Margaret Lloyd". Amazingly, the antipodean teenager prevailed. Her display of pluck was a foretaste of future battles.

By December 1936, Mary's first film, *That Man's Here Again*, was

As a Warner Bros. starlet, Mary was treated to all the trappings. Below: Mary co-starred with Ronald Reagan in 1937's *Sergeant Murphy*. Presidential biographers claim they were an off-screen item.



in the can, with her name and Aussie accent intact. Released in mid-1937, it was a slight but pleasant romantic comedy. Her reviews were good, with critics seeing promise of better things to come.

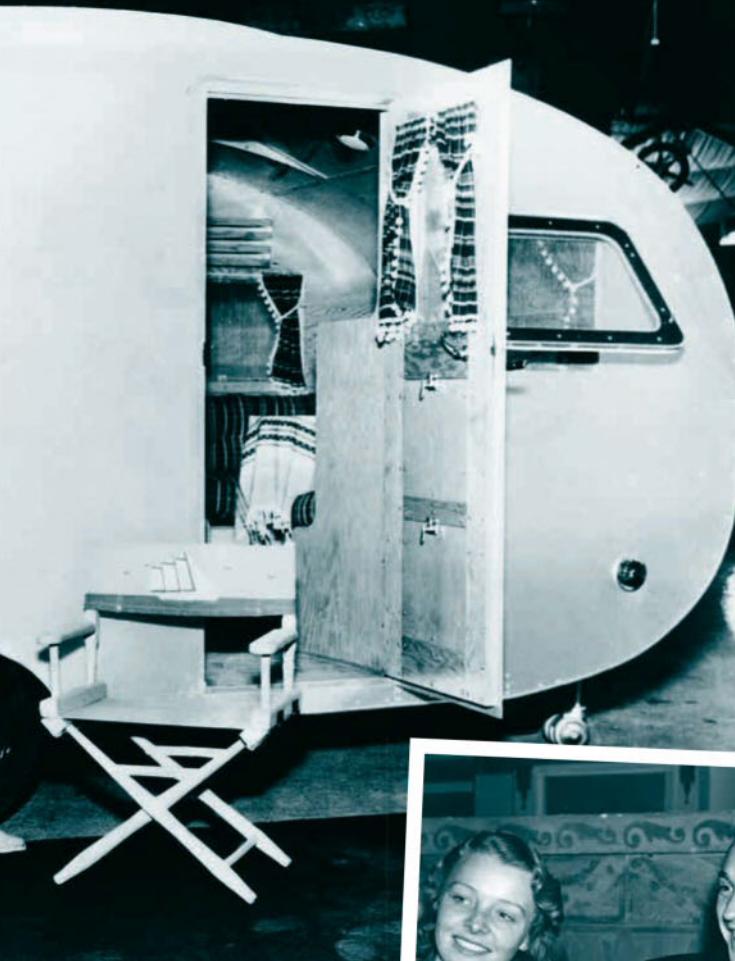
But the majority of newspaper coverage was about Mary's off-screen activities. Not that she was any sort of hellraiser. Rather, these were the halcyon days of studio publicists carefully controlling the public images for their contract stars. That meant the beautiful young Aussie became a regular subject of news pictorials and gossip pages. Clickers were dutifully on hand to photograph her family reunions and the beauty regime that ensured her elbows stayed soft. Reporters faithfully transcribed her quirky plans to finance a range of koala and kangaroo soft toys. Columnists purported to be fascinated by the fact that she had the smallest feet in Tinseltown.

And, as part of the star-building process, Mary was expected to be seen out on the town.

Newspapers across the world reported her supposed dalliances with Tom Brown, co-star of *That Man's Here Again*, eccentric aviator-producer

"BIOGRAPHERS CLAIM MARY AND RONALD REAGAN WERE AN ITEM OFF SET."





Howard Hughes, fresh from his split with Katie Hepburn, Alfred G. Vanderbilt, scion of one of America's richest families, and attorney Greg Bautzer, whose many conquests were recently revealed in biography *The Man Who Seduced Hollywood*.

Within a year of her arrival in Hollywood, Mary's trajectory looked stellar. She had public profile and Warners were grooming her for bigger films. Audiences saw her in a small but vivid role in A-list picture *Confession*, which starred Kay Francis and Basil Rathbone. But Mary had more to do in the studio's B-pictures, headlining with Ronald Reagan in cheerful horse flick *Sergeant Murphy* and third-billed in crime melodrama *Alcatraz Island*.

According to some of his biographers, Mary and Ronnie were an item during the filming of *Sergeant Murphy*. While it's difficult to penetrate the echo chamber of publicist ballyhoo to know if they really had an affair, it seems probable she had a serious relationship at this time with Joseph M. Schenck, the chairman of 20th Century Fox who was nearly 40 years her senior. Perhaps heeding the example of Jocelyn Howarth, whose career had already been ruined by a high-profile marriage gone wrong, Mary wisely kept quiet about her Hollywood romantic entanglements.

Mary was doing good but not everything went her way. She seemed plagued by accidents and illnesses. There were a couple of minor car crashes, a case of ptomaine poisoning, a serious fall down some steps and a debilitating case of the flu. Most disturbing were reports that she had



been hospitalised with a nervous breakdown said to be caused by the pressures of stardom.

Exactly why Mary "mutinied" against Warners in 1938 is unknown. She was said to be fed up with "ingénue" roles and this frustration led her to refuse the lead in a thriller called *Mystery House*. It was an extraordinary move for a young player to make. To put it in perspective: bona fide A-list star Bette Davis had recently pulled a similar stunt and was very publicly sued into submission by the studio. But, stunningly, Mary was let out of her contract. Was she too high strung or too combative to bother with? Possibly. But the fact she was immediately signed by Fox for a seven-year contract hints at string-pulling by an infatuated Schenck.

But if, as the press so often claimed, the middle-aged mogul had hopes for marrying Mary, he was soon to be sorely disappointed. She made only one American picture for Fox, *The Mysterious Mr. Moto*, with Peter Lorre, before abruptly leaving Hollywood for England. In London, she co-starred in *Smiling Through*, her last picture for Schenck's studio, before signing with Associated British Picture Corporation. In her next film, *The Outsider*, she played a crippled woman cured by George Sanders's quack doctor.



Promo photo for 1937's *Alcatraz Island*. Mary was billed beneath Ann Sheridan but had a better role.

Inset: As part of the Warners deal she was expected to be seen out on the town.

Watching it today is to see an actress growing ever more beautiful as she stretches her dramatic talents. Having rejected Hollywood on her own terms, Mary was starring in the movies she wanted to make.

BUT FROM LATE 1938 BAD LUCK, BAD HEALTH AND bad decisions conspired to turn Mary's life into a tragedy. During the filming of *Black Eyes* she collapsed on set and had to be rushed to hospital for an appendectomy. In July 1939 she fell and broke her leg while shooting *An Englishman's Home*, which warned of the looming threat of war and would be released as *Mad Men Of Europe* after WWII started.

Most devastatingly of all, in June 1939 Mary fell in love with the wrong man. The object of her affections was a British blue-blood named Robert Gordon-Canning. Thirty years her senior, he was a descendant of Lord Byron, a WWI veteran, an Arabic expert and a published poet. The aristocrat was also a prominent member of the British Union Of Fascists and a strident anti-Semite. Gordon-Canning was so in with the Nazis that he had been best man at Oswald Moseley's 1936 wedding which was held at the German home of Joseph Goebbels and had Adolf Hitler as its guest of honour.

Remarkably, Mary seemed to think she could remain above his poisonous political beliefs. "I have no Fascist sympathies," she told *The Australian Women's Weekly* in July 1939, "and do not intend to take part in my fiancé's political life... I was given my big chance in Hollywood, where there are many Jews. It would be both ungrateful and unkind of me to ally myself because of marriage with the Fascist Party." For all of her protestations, Mary went on to say she would accompany her husband to the Nazis' annual Nuremberg Rally on September 2. With war looming, it's hard to know if she was naïve, deluded or callous. ➤



Clockwise: Mary's last film for Fox was 1938's *The Mysterious Mr. Moto*; Mary beams with baby Michael in London in 1941; With WWII looming, Mary married Robert Gordon-Canning, a prominent British fascist and Hitlerite.

"MARY DESERVES HER PLACE IN AUSTRALIAN FILM HISTORY AS A TRAILBLAZER."

The couple were married in August 1939, with Mary carried into the ceremony in an invalid chair. In a weird echo of *The Flying Doctor*, she and her groom didn't spend their wedding night together, with Mary returning to hospital. In interviews, she proclaimed her love for her husband — and her pleasure that he'd given her gifts of a mink coat, jewels and a Rolls Royce. But the happy couple didn't get to honeymoon in Nuremberg. Hitler cancelled the Nazi rally because he and his madmen were too busy invading Poland.

British authorities didn't take too kindly to the Führer's homegrown supporters. Along with Moseley and other fascists, Gordon-Canning was in July 1940 banged up in Brixton Prison as a potential fifth columnist. His young bride, then just 21 and in the early stages of pregnancy, said her goodbyes at the gaol's gates. But far worse was to come. Their son, Michael, was born in February 1941, with Robert allowed out under guard to see the boy for one hour. Tragically, the child died the following January after a sudden illness. It's ironic that what would be her final film, 1942's *This Was Paris*, sees her playing the girlfriend of a journalist who's the sworn enemy of Nazi fifth columnists.

In August 1943 Gordon-Canning was released from prison. But by then Mary had met Philip Legarra, an American aeronautical engineer. It must've infuriated the Nazi-loving upper-crust Brit when he learned he'd been usurped not just by a Yank commoner but by one who had a key role in overseeing the Mustang fighter planes so essential to allied air superiority over the Nazis in Europe.

After Gordon-Canning divorced Mary in 1944, she married Legarra and told the press she was glad to be with someone her own age.

Mary and Philip sailed for New York in May 1945, just after Hitler had blown his brains out. In contrast to the hoopla that attended her arrival in the UK in 1938, she departed without fanfare and listed herself as Helene Legarra, housewife.

But the 27-year-old hadn't given up on stardom quite yet. In March 1946 Mary told a US newspaper that she was optimistic of landing a supporting role in the adaptation of the novel *Forever Amber*. "I think I'll do better and last longer as a character actress," she said. Calling Gordon-Canning a "closed chapter", she refused to discuss her unrepentant Hitlerite ex, who had recently made headlines by buying a bust of the Führer. In a strange coincidence a small article on the same page reported that Constance Worth's return to films after a decade's absence had been almost entirely relegated to the cutting-room floor. Mary wouldn't even get a chance at a comeback. *Forever Amber* went ahead without her.

IT'S HERE THAT MARY'S TRAIL GOES COLD. ELECTORAL records show that she and Philip lived at various LA addresses before settling in Long Beach. During the 1950s and '60s he filed a few more patents, including one for a bomb-ejection system, but Mary's name now only



appeared in TV listings when her old movies played late at night.

One can only wonder how she felt in the next three decades, living in Los Angeles, the city forever swirling with the people she had called friends, colleagues and contemporaries.

"I was looking for that fairytale ending where Mary went back into the movies and lived happily ever after," says Norman Archibald of his investigations into his

relative's final years. "But it didn't happen." Many years ago he tracked down one of Philip Legarra's relatives, who told him Mary never got over the death of her son — or a later abortion she had. "Sadly, Mary died an alcoholic," Archibald says. "Alcohol also killed her second husband." Indeed, both died prematurely. Legarra was 56 when he passed away in 1971. Mary followed him to the grave on May 18, 1974, aged just 55. Her death wasn't news here or in the US.

These days you can still see Australia's one-time sweetheart if you look hard enough. *Heritage*'s recent local DVD release is a good starting point. The NSFA has copies of *The Flying Doctor* available for the public to view. Her movies pop up occasionally on TCM in the United States.

Mary's is an "if only" story. If only she'd stuck with Warners, if only she'd ducked Gordon-Canning, if only she'd landed that comeback role. Had any of those things happened, she might be remembered — and even celebrated — today as one of Australia's earliest stars. Although it wasn't to be, Mary Maguire deserves a place in our film history as a woman who blazed a trail of stardom, celebrity, independence and controversy decades before "our" Cate, Nicole and Naomi were born.

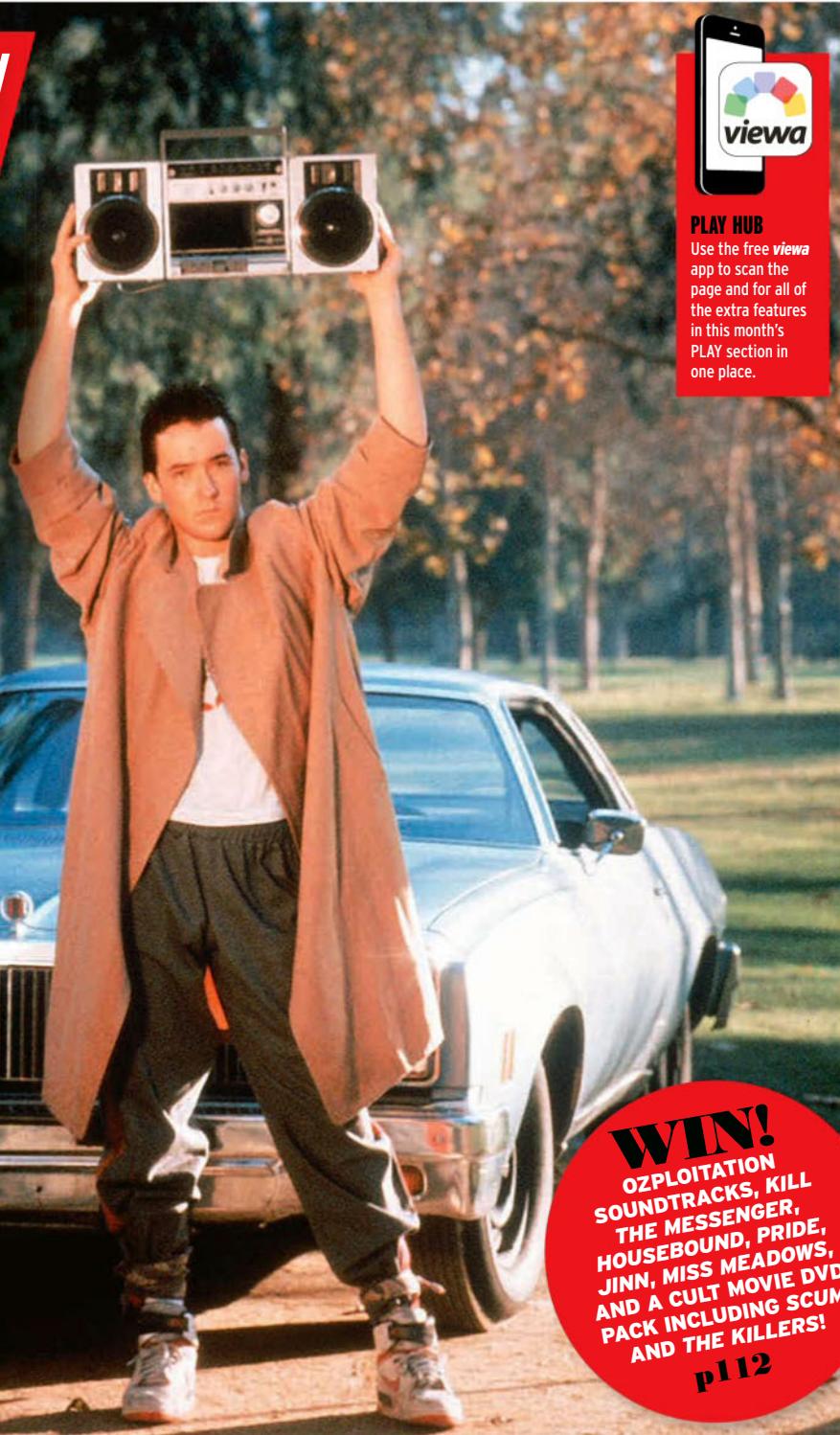
PLAY

DVD, BLU-RAY, TV ETC.

HIGH FIDELITY

p107

Cameron Crowe's classic teen rom-com *Say Anything* enjoys a re-release on DVD. Press play...



Also: Blockbusterama!

Savour at home: *Mockingjay – Part 1*, *Big Hero 6*, *Dracula Untold*, *Get On Up*, *Maps To The Stars*, *Palo Alto*, *The Water Diviner* and lots more.

WIN!
OZPLOITATION SOUNDTRACKS, KILL THE MESSENGER, HOUSEBOUND, PRIDE, JINN, MISS MEADOWS, AND A CULT MOVIE DVD PACK INCLUDING SCUM AND THE KILLERS!

p112

106



REWIND: Tough guys galore: Arnie! Clint! Winstone! Erm... Geoffrey Coombs!

108



HARDWARE: The skinniest, crispest, contrastiest TV around is now affordable. Ish.



109

MASTERMIND: From kickin' Mel Gibson's ass to motherin' Thor – it's Rene Russo!



110

MASTERPIECE: Da-da-dutta-dah dutta-duh dutta-dah, Da-da-dutta-dah dutta-duh...



114

CLASSIC SCENE: The biopic of a French wrestler named Andre taken too soon... oh, wait...

PLAY



DO THE ROBOT
Use the free
viewa app to scan
the page and go
behind-the-scenes
of the movie!

The thumb war was
over before it had
even begun.



BIG HERO 6

2014 B-R 3D DD

Baymax Watch

Out March 25 / Rated PG / Directors Chris Williams, Don Hall / Cast Ryan Potter, Scott Adsit, Damon Wayans Jr., Genesis Rodriguez, T.J. Miller, Jamie Chung



AS THE FIRST WALT DISNEY ANIMATION

Studios movie to draw directly from Marvel Comics' rich history, *Big Hero 6* is a thrillingly bright and energetic superhero team origin adventure, brimming with all the high-velocity aerobatic action scenes and neat sci-fi trimmings we've come to expect from any live-action Marvel Studios product. Yet its relationship with the Marvel title, a three-issue mini-series concerning a Japanese supergroup (originally led by Silver Samurai, recently found in *The Wolverine*), doesn't go far beyond filching character names and broadstrokes concepts.

The film's Marvelesque 'catch the mystery villain' central plot doesn't kick in until halfway through, prompting a tech-driven supergroup formation so speedy it makes Stark Industries look positively medieval. And while fun-for-the-kids in a Scooby-Doo-meets-Power-Rangers kinda way, it's not nearly as universally affecting as what lies at the story's distinctly more Disney heart: the relationship between 14-year-old whizzkid Hiro (Ryan Potter) and his

inherited "healthcare companion", Baymax (Scott Adsit).

The original Baymax was a "synthetic bodyguard" who could turn into a dragon. The reinvention is a masterclass in character design. Edgeless, rotund and balloon-y, the movie's Baymax is the design sweet spot between a bouncy castle and an iPad. His minimalist face is little more than an emoticon. Couldn't be simpler, couldn't be more expressionistic. He walks in a dainty, tippy-toe manner that is both entirely appropriate to his airy girth and also endlessly appealing. As voiced by Adsit, he has a soothing, affable demeanour that makes him instantly and permanently lovable.

It's in the burgeoning, *Iron Giant*-style friendship between Baymax and Hiro that we find *Big Hero 6*'s most humorous and heartwarming moments, especially during the early stages of the film, as the guileless inflatable sidekick with the limitless medical knowledge proves entertainingly incongruous to high-stakes adventure.

Later, Hiro forms the titular group, drawn

from his science-nerd chums, pimping and weaponising their own inventions. Baymax is squished into bright-scarlet battle armour and like Neo before him, he learns kung fu in an instant. While there's huge entertainment in the action scenes that follow, you can't help feeling that something's become a little bit lost in the mix. It doesn't help either that the villain's motive is highly questionable, while the other members of *Big Hero 6* are barely fleshed out beyond their evident merchandising appeal as action figures – with the noted exception of stoner dude Fred (T. J. Miller), whose drawling non sequiturs make him a crowd-pleaser.

Directors Don Hall and Chris Williams, though, revel in their incidentally multicultural setting and the border-blurring hybrid city San Fransokyo is a joyous blend of neon-washed alleyways and Miyazaki-referencing sky turbines, whirring high above the city's streets. There is also, wedged somewhere in there, a welcome message about the value of not-for-profit scientific research... Even if it does concern laser-blades, monster suits, nanotechnology and big, friendly balloon-bots.

EXTRAS Feast theatrical short, deleted scenes, *Big Animator 6: The Characters Behind The Characters*, *The Origin Story Of Big Hero 6: Hiro's Journey*. (Unpreviewed)

DAN JOLIN

FILM ★★★★☆

"The design sweet spot between a bouncy castle and an iPad."

B-R DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY

3D DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON 3D BLU-RAY

DD DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

UV DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ULTRAVIOLET

HIS FACE

I was looking at a lot of robots and they looked too human, so they were creepy. We played with the face a lot and then during a trip to Japan I was at a temple and I looked up and there was this bell. It had that two circles and a line thing that became Baymax's face. I know it sounds weird, but the bell felt very peaceful and calming.

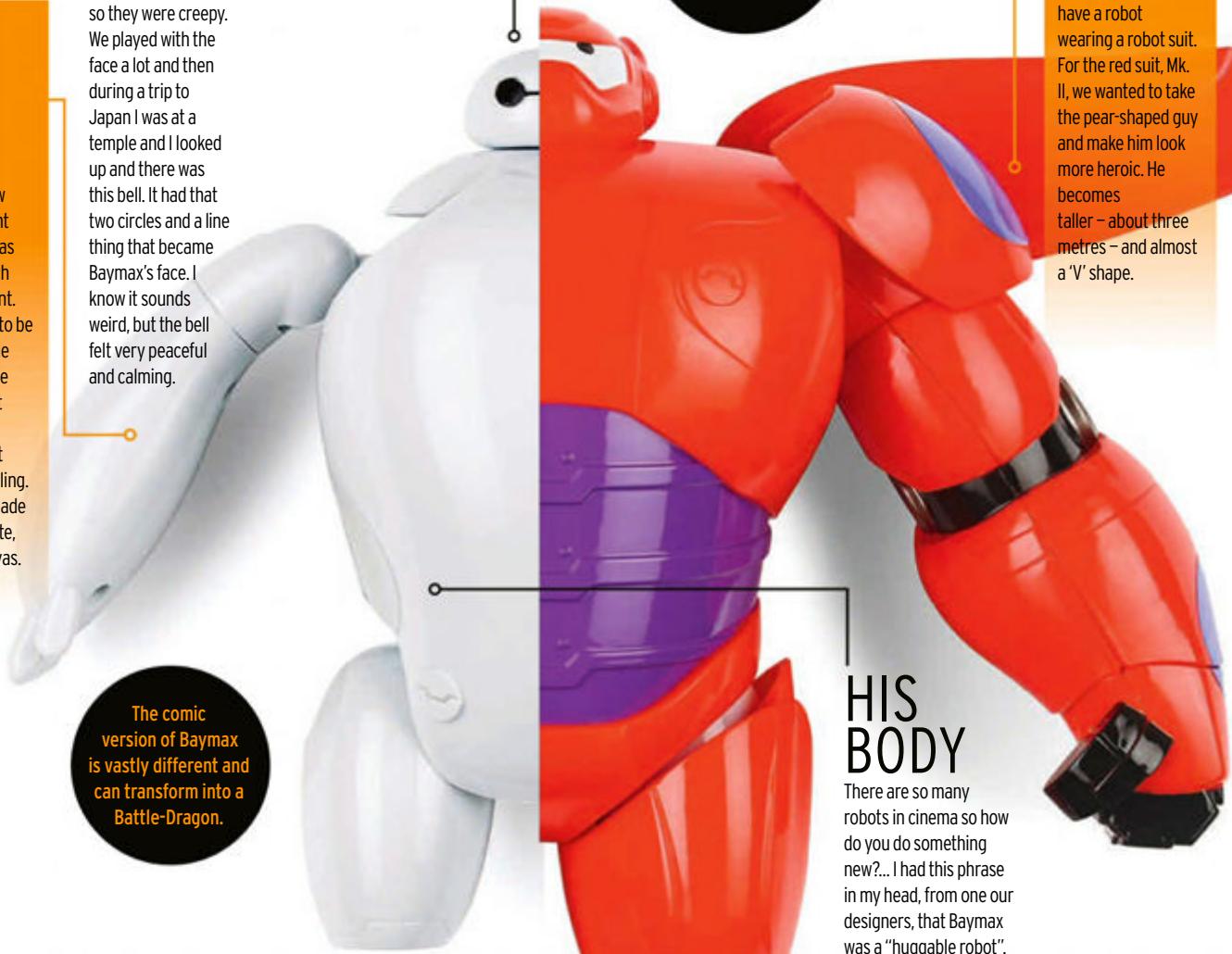
HIS SKIN

At one point, because the technology I saw used transparent vinyl, Baymax was going to be much more transparent. You were going to be able to see all the machinery inside him, but we kept pulling it back because it didn't look very appealing. Eventually we made him opaque white, like a blank canvas.

Baymax debuted in Marvel's *Sunfire & Big Hero 6* in 1998. *BH6* is not part of the MCU.

HIS SUIT

I always thought it was funny that we have a robot wearing a robot suit. For the red suit, Mk. II, we wanted to take the pear-shaped guy and make him look more heroic. He becomes taller – about three metres – and almost a 'V' shape.



BUILDING BAYMAX

How Disney assembled its latest — and cutest — big hero

IN *BIG HERO 6*, DISNEY INTRODUCES BAYMAX, A KINDLY, CHUBBY nurse robot who helps to heal Hiro, a 14-year-old boy who loses his brother, Tadashi, Baymax's inventor, in a terrible accident. As Hiro investigates who caused his brother's death, Baymax helps the boy grieve and becomes the film's breakout. Co-director Don Hall talks us through the design of the squashy sidekick. **OLLY RICHARDS**

Baymax is voiced by Scott Adsit, best-known as producer Pete on *30 Rock*.

HIS BODY

There are so many robots in cinema so how do you do something new?... I had this phrase in my head, from one our designers, that Baymax was a "huggable robot". On a research trip at Carnegie Mellon University I met Chris Atkeson who was doing research in soft robotics. That was a lightning bolt moment. He showed me an arm that was made of vinyl, and inflatable. The idea about soft robotics is that eventually they'll be used in the healthcare industry because they can't hurt us.

HIS LEGS

I always liked the idea that he would have elephant legs. I've been to Africa and was always so impressed by how quietly elephants walk. They're my favourite animal. So we worked that into Baymax's chubby little legs.

11 helpful movie robots that will ruin your life



PLAY

The *Unbreakable* auditions were tough.

GET ON UP 2014

B-R DD UV

The funk is strong in this one

Out March 26 / Rated M / Director Tate Taylor / Cast Chadwick Boseman, Nelsan Ellis, Dan Aykroyd



JAMES BROWN PRIDED HIMSELF ON many things – humility was hardly one of his virtues – but one of the self-applied accolades he touted the most was his rep as 'The Hardest Working Man In Show Business'. And as a man with 94 U.S.-charting hit singles to his name, who barely stopped performing his entire adult life, it was no hollow boast. So any biopic tackling Brown would need

to take a creative approach to cram even half of it in. And Tate 'The Help' Taylor's *Get On Up* is nothing if not bold and inventive.

It begins with a semi-comical routine set in 1988, involving a woman crapping in a toilet, a self-help business course and a raging, crack-addled, shotgun-toting Minister Of New New Super Heavy Funk. Then it timewarps to 20 years earlier, over the skies of Vietnam, where Mr. Brown and his band draw fire from the

enemy and screech down a military-base runway with a flaming engine. Then it whips back to 1939 and Brown's impoverished shack-in-the-bayou childhood, then forward to 1964 to the star's celebrated appearance on the *T.A.M.I.* show, where he upstaged The Rolling Stones. All the while, Mr. Brown himself, in the totally impressive form of Chadwick Boseman, acts as our host, delivering that husky jabber-patter to camera, hard-selling the legend (and who knows, maybe a good dose of truth, too). It's as if his crack-infused ego is haunting his own past – at points he appears with himself in the background, or even jumps out of a scene mid-dialogue, leaving his manager, Ben Bart (Blues Brother Dan Aykroyd paying it back), patronising thin air. As an approach it is sometimes jarring, and it allows Brown to let himself off a little too much (his notably off-screen wifebeating, for example). But in an electrifying, career-making performance, Boseman plays it just right. This relative newcomer never lets us forget that Mr. Brown was toughest on those who loved him most, and was as sociopathic as he was charismatic. Even if Taylor's cut 'n' paste craziness does prove too dizzying, Boseman's magnetism, on-stage and off, will keep you rooted.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more. (Unpreviewed)

DAN JOLIN

FILM ★★★★☆



B-R DD

PRIDE 2014

Out Now / Rated M / Director Matthew Warchus / Cast Bill Nighy, Imelda Staunton, Dominic West, Andrew Scott

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED TO FIND A more unlikely pairing than trade unionist Arthur Scargill-era coal pit workers and the '80s LGBT community. Nevertheless, just such an alliance forms the beating heart of *Pride*, Matthew 'Simpatico' Warchus's cockle-toasting, true-life, 2014 Queer Palm winning tale of tolerance, friendship and Thatcherite oppression. And the soundtrack is a belter.

EXTRAS Director's commentary, a few deleted scenes and a solid docu-short about the film's real-life characters.

JAMES DYER

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆



B-R DD

LEFT BEHIND 2014

Out March 25 / Rated M / Director Vic Armstrong / Cast Nicolas Cage, Lea Thompson, Cassi Thomson

STUNT KING VIC 'I WAS INDY'S STUNT double' Armstrong will forever be an *Empire* hero, but this directorial effort is a holy mess. Armstrong obviously didn't pay attention while working for some of the industry's greats. A transatlantic flight is hit by the Rapture, causing the righteous to vanish and Nicolas Cage, as the philandering pilot, to Bible up. Yep, it's *Convert Air*. It's a tough call as to which is funnier: the incessant treacly music, or the family photo in which Cage resembles a Gelfling.

EXTRAS None.

NICK DE SEMILYEN

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆



B-R DD

MISS MEADOWS 2014

Out Now / Rated M / Director Karen Leigh Hopkins / Cast Katie Holmes, James Badge Dale, Callan Mulvey

FROM THE DIRECTOR/PRODUCER OF sappy romance *Because I Said So*, one could expect more of the same. Yet Hopkins's titular Miss Meadows (Holmes), a bizarre, sunshine'n'lollipops flavoured vigilante-cum-kindergarten teacher, eschews affairs of the heart except when filling them with hot lead. A tonal mess, this dumps a cutesified Travis Bickle in Cloud Cuckoo Land with a narrative short of gears. Holmes is oddball fun, but quirky brutal retribution has been done with more style elsewhere.

EXTRAS None.

DANNY MACKENZIE

FILM ★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆



B-R

HALO: NIGHTFALL 2014

Out March 17 / Rated M / Director Sergio Mimica-Gezzan / Cast Mike Colter, Christina Chong, Steve Waddington

CREATED AS A LIVE ACTION PRELUDE TO Microsoft's upcoming *Halo 5: Guardians*, this should have gone the way of its now defunct streaming studio, X Box Entertainment. Recut from web series to a feature and executive produced by Ridley Scott, this dull space opera sees soldier Jameson Locke (Colter) and his team battle wormy aliens and each other in the 26th century. Completely uninspired from script to CGI to performances, it's unlikely to engage even *Halo* aficionados.

EXTRAS Featurette. (Unpreviewed)

JIM MITCHELL

FILM ★★★★☆

B-R DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY

3D DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON 3D BLU-RAY

DD DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

UV DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ULTRAVIOLET



SEE STARS

Use the free **viewa** app to scan the page and watch an exclusive clip!



MAPS TO THE STARS

Hollywood or bust

Out March 25 / Rated MA15+ / Director David Cronenberg / Cast Julianne Moore, Mia Wasikowska, Robert Pattinson, John Cusack



HOLLYWOOD LOVES TO SATIRISE ITSELF.
For decades, directors who sit just outside the mainstream, but not so far that they don't have the numbers of everyone in the inner circle, have stuck pins in

Hollywood's collective big, puffy ego and reduced it to a pathetic, flaccid sadness. It is almost a cliché for moviemakers to point out their own insecurities, constant blagging and fear of discovery. So to enter that party you'd better have a new take. David Cronenberg does, because David Cronenberg does not do re-hashing.

Cronenberg's Tinseltown is a place of reversed generations. The ageing characters behave like children, but it was ever thus. Actors are frequently depicted as just toddlers whose outsides grew too big for their tiny personalities. Julianne Moore, in one of two award-worthy turns this year, is the unsuccessful daughter of a dead starlet to whose legend she can never live up. John Cusack and Olivia Williams are a

power couple who mask their total lack of soul with self-help gibberish and by being awful to people they consider less important.

It's their son, Benjie (Evan Bird, caught just at the most physically awkward point of adolescence), who offers a look at a new Hollywood, where the big money is in teenage stars expected to drive their careers before they're old enough to drive cars. As the old stars revert back to childhood, the young ones jump to a confused middle age. His messed-up existence is, one imagines, probably quite familiar to a few Disney Channel muppets.

Sweeping into it all is Agatha (Mia Wasikowska), a heavily medicated, heavily scarred, deeply serious young woman on a search for something. She seems several flashbulbs short of a premiere, but at least hers is an honest madness. Everyone else she encounters as she weaves these stories together is a publicly functioning lunatic.

All this acid comes with plenty of fizz. This is one of the funniest movies Cronenberg has made, high on darkly wry



Rock, peyote,
scissors.

observations and people spouting vile things under the pretence of helping. As he flays off the skin of his cast to get to the dark, squirming nastiness beneath, Cronenberg keeps a big smile on his face.

EXTRAS A swathe of interviews with cast and crew snipped up into easily digestible, mostly thin, soundbites, so they all stop talking before they've said anything interesting. Maybe it's an ironic statement?

OLLY RICHARDS

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



“This is one of the funniest movies Cronenberg has made.”

John Cusack: A Viewer's Guide



PLAY

Donkeyless Pin The Tail On The Donkey:
pointless.

KILL THE MESSENGER

2014 B-R DD

Press under pressure

Out March 11 / Rated M / Director Michael Cuesta / Cast Jeremy Renner, Oliver Platt, Rosemarie DeWitt



INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM HAS proven time and again to be a ripe source for fact-based thrillers, given their natural tendency towards escalating tension and noblest conviction. *Kill The*

Messenger initially looks to march to the beat of the same drum as *All The President's Men* and *The Insider*, following San Jose reporter Gary Webb (Jeremy Renner) as he inadvertently

uncovers a suspect connection between the CIA and Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

While covering the eviction of drug dealers from their ill-gotten homes, a defendant's girlfriend (Paz Vega) hands Gary a deposition too revealing to ignore. It's not his paper's usual story, putting them in a position to scoop bigger outlets should they run the less-than-credible word of proven criminals. As Webb dismisses off-the-record warnings, on-the-ground rebels

and endless government stonewalling, *Messenger* flits between the charge of sticking it to the man while sympathising with its subject to nearly a fault.

Making these procedural aspects go down easier is a great cast, ranging from Andy Garcia and Michael K. Williams as informants behind bars to Barry Pepper and Michael Sheen as federal men advising caution. And that's not to mention Tim Blake Nelson, Ray Liotta and Robert Patrick all putting in appearances. It would have been nice to see some of these familiar faces for longer than a scene or two each, but they uniformly serve their roles well.

The film becomes more involving in its second hour, when the publication of Webb's article is very swiftly undermined by an administration intent on discrediting him. Renner's performance evolves from one of cockiness to one of wariness and increasing remorse, as Gary's editor (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and publisher (Oliver Platt) begin to distance themselves, and his own wife (Rosemarie DeWitt) wavers in her support. The film matches him in kind, turning its simplistic David-and-Goliath story into a sobering Icarus tale about a man whose pursuit of the truth would ultimately come at a cost.

EXTRAS Featurettes, more. (Unpreviewed)

WILLIAM GOSS

FILM ★★★★



This was gonna be tough to explain to the paramedics.

B-R DD UV

HORNS

2013

Out March 18 / Rated R18+ / Director Alexandre Aja / Cast Daniel Radcliffe, David Morse, Heather Graham

WHEN IG PERRISH (DANIEL RADCLIFFE) WAKES WITH A splitting headache, it's more than just the mother of all hangovers. He has satanic protuberances growing out of his temples. These newly grown horns prove unusually useful in Ig's mission to prove he did not, as accused, kill his own girlfriend, as they force anyone nearby to confess their darkest secrets. Keith Bunin's script sticks slavishly to Joe Hill's source novel, which doesn't work without the book's inner monologue. It makes for a confused, uninvolved story, not helped by Aja's inconsistent tone.

EXTRAS Behind-the-scenes. (Unpreviewed)

OLLY RICHARDS

FILM ★★★★



DRACULA UNTOLD

2014

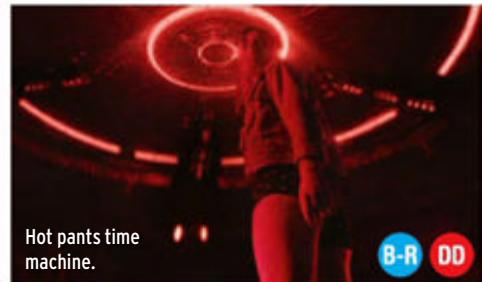
Out March 12 / Rated M / Director Gary Shore / Cast Luke Evans, Dominic Cooper, Sarah Gadon

BARD THE BOWMAN HAS A BLOODY BAD DAY AS LUKE Evans's initially sympathetic nobleman, Vlad 'The Impaler' Dracula, vamps it up to save his country. Essentially a superhero origin story for an inherently evil character, it's a monstrous mish-mash of disparate tones, half-baked ideas and CG bats that barely raises a scream. Evans is the best thing in it by a bloody mile, which isn't saying much, and the whole monstrous shebang is misjudged. After the awful *I, Frankenstein*, the Universal Monsters are not looking in good shape.

EXTRAS Blu-ray includes deleted scenes, Luke Evans mini-doc, alternative opening, more.

ANDREW PARKINSON

FILM ★★★★ **EXTRAS ★★★★**



EXTRATERRESTRIAL

2014

Out April 1 / Rated MA15+ / Director Colin Minihan / Cast Brittany Allen, Freddie Stroma, Michael Ironside

IN AND AROUND A RELATIVELY LAVISH CABIN IN THE woods, some young folks – and value-for-money paranoid veteran Michael Ironside – are bothered by spindly-limbed, bulb-headed aliens from a crashed saucer. It's a deliberately cliché-ridden B picture from The Vicious Brothers (aka Colin Minihan and Stuart Ortiz) which includes a few Camcorded close encounters but isn't a found-footage film. Instead, it nicely fills a drive-in-friendly widescreen frame with retro shocks that straddle the worlds of Steven Spielberg and George Romero with nods to *The X-Files*.

EXTRAS None.

KIM NEWMAN

FILM ★★★★ **EXTRAS ★★★★**

B-R DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY

3D DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON 3D BLU-RAY

DD DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

UV DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ULTRAVIOLET



PALO ALTO

2014 B-R DD

The Outsiders

Out March 18 / Rated MA15+ / Director Gia Coppola / Cast Emma Roberts, James Franco, Jack Kilmer, Nat Wolff



DIRECTED BY A COPPOLA OFFSPRING and based on a James Franco short story collection, *Palo Alto* may sound too cool for high school in conception. But go with it.

Debutante filmmaker Gia Coppola, granddaughter to Francis, niece to Sofia and Roman, cousin of Nic Cage and Jason Schwartzman, has fashioned a terrific, truthful portrait of teenage lives, delivered with a

naturalness and compassion more seasoned directors can only dream of.

In essence *Palo Alto* is a succession of house parties, bedroom hangouts and aimless drives linked by listless interacting teens rather than anything approaching a plot. It doesn't really have much more to say about teen life than the average John Hughes flick but, as it flits between humour and horror (a bottling comes out of nowhere), it doesn't force its characters

into stereotypes. They evolve and deepen over the 100 minutes.

If Coppola's lovely languid style, all lingering close ups on poignant details, mellow electronica and dream-like steadicam, is reminiscent of Aunt Sofia's, *Palo Alto* has more texture and a tougher, scuzzier edge than say *The Virgin Suicides* or *The Bling Ring*. Instead Coppola's teens feel closer to the worlds of Larry Clark (*Kids*) and Harmony Korine (*Spring Breakers*) but with a tenderness and generosity absent from either. Coppola revels in their mistakes and insecurities but doesn't preach. She has as much feeling for "blowjob whore" Emily (Zoe Levin) and off the chain Fred (Eric Wolff) as she does for sensitive types April (Emma Roberts, niece of Julia) and Teddy (Jack Kilmer, son of Val).

It doesn't completely hang together and it feels a tad long in its longuers but Coppola makes you care, drawing terrific performances from her young quartet. Wolff burns a hole in the screen, Levin shines as the school lay, Kilmer does a nice line in quiet introspection but Roberts is the standout, heartbreakingly as she suggests longings and anxieties without over-hyping it. Much like the film itself.

EXTRAS Behind-the-scenes featurette. (Unpreviewed)

IAN FREER

FILM ★★★★



WINTER SLEEP

2014
Out March 20 / Rated M / Director Nuri Bilge Ceylan /
Cast Haluk Bilginer, Melisa Sözen, Demet Akbag

TURKISH. 196 MINUTES. MICRO-INTIMATE DRAMA. LAST year's Palme d'Or winner. *Winter Sleep* is all these, meaning mainstream punters will flee. More fool them, because the slowburn study of wealthy pontificator Aydin (Bilginer) satisfies on many levels. Inspired by Chekhov stories, this portrait of proud imperfection imbues depth and perception rarely seen outside novels. The soul-scorching of Aydin, his tormented wife (Sözen) and embittered sister (Akbag) drills into hypocrisy, self-righteousness, philanthropy and social/spiritual divides. Top marks for acting, screenplay and enveloping atmospherics.

EXTRAS None.

BEN McEACHEN

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT

2014
Out March 11 / Rated M / Directors Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne / Cast Marion Cotillard, Fabrizio Rongione

PROVING AGAIN THAT HER SILENT FILM BEAUTY IS surpassed only by her sublime talent, Marion Cotillard delivers a quietly complex – and Oscar-nominated – performance in the latest humanist gem from the Dardenne brothers. As an unemployed factory worker who embarks on a door-knock quest to win back her old job, Cotillard isn't so much deglamourised as she is transformed by the heartbreaking gesture of her performance. *Two Days* is an unlikely nail-biter, and Cotillard's portrait of a woman unravelling against the turmoil of mental illness is as ravishing as it is affecting.

EXTRAS Interview with Marion Cotillard.

LUKE GOODSELL

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



A THOUSAND TIMES GOOD NIGHT

2013
Out April 1 / Rated M / Director Erik Poppe / Cast Juliette Binoche, Lauryn Canny, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau

THE EVER-TERRIFIC JULIETTE BINOCHE SHINES AS A photojournalist caught between the importance of her work and the pull of her family. Opening on a fantastically tense set-piece in which Binoche's Rebecca is caught within a suicide bombing cell, the film plays with well-worn themes (the ethics of journalist intervention, career versus life), but Erik Poppe's clean visual sense and the fact Binoche is a rare female protagonist uncomfortable with domesticity make it feel fresh. And U2 fans, keep 'em peeled for drummer Larry Mullen Jr. in a bit part.

EXTRAS None.

IF

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

Luke Evans On Smaug and what he'll miss most about Bard



PLAY

Running with crossbows: fraught.

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY – PART 1 2014

Less stalking, more talking

Out Now / Rated M / Director Francis Lawrence / Cast Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth

B-R DD UV

**SERENA** 2014

Out March 26 / Rated MA15+ / Director Susanne Bier / Cast Bradley Cooper, Jennifer Lawrence, Rhys Ifans

BRADLEY COOPER AND JENNIFER LAWRENCE ARE lumberjack and lumberjill in Susanne 'In A Better World' Bier's uneven period melodrama about love, logging and lashings of ultraviolence. Cooper's a one-dimensional timber merchant, Lawrence his bride with a mysterious past; when their tedious romance turns sour, both she and the film lose the plot. For a couple of actors whose stars have well and truly ascended, this is a huge step back from Oscar and box-office glory. Even Lawrence's magic touch can't save this one.

EXTRAS Four featurettes, director/writer interview and a trailer.

NEIL ALCOCK

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

**GOD HELP THE GIRL** 2014

Out March 18 / Rated M / Director Stuart Murdoch / Cast Emily Browning, Olly Alexander, Hannah Murray

THE KICKSTARTED BRAINCHILD OF BELLE & SEBASTIAN'S Stuart Murdoch, this sunny, Scottish-set musical is *Sunshine On Leith* for skinny-jeaned hipsters. Songwriting depressive Eve (Browning with a bob) hooks up with geeky guitarist James (Alexander) and English rose Cass (Murray) to form a band and do the stuff bands do: canoe, frolic in a park, argue over a name, fall for each other and yearn for the radio to play their "cassettes". It's naive, meandering and amateurish but it gets by on warmth, moments of real joy and a genuine sincerity and affection for its supersensitive teens.

EXTRAS Behind-the-scenes. (Unpreviewed)

IAN FREER

FILM ★★★★



THERE ARE MANY MONOLOGUES IN *Mockingjay – Part 1*. Woody Harrelson has one. Julianne Moore has several. You get a bonus Donald Sutherland rant on the Blu-ray/ DVD menu. It's almost a shock when the end credits arrive without ginger kitty Buttercup miaowing for five minutes in close-up.

After the action-driven first two movies, this instalment stomps on the brakes. Imagine the Mon Mothma briefing from *Return Of The Jedi*, stretched to feature length. But if it's mostly marking time until Katniss and her army take on the Capitol (we probably didn't need to see a lot of back-and-forth assaults to remind us that Sutherland's President Snow is an utter shit), at least it's a cast of supreme quality doing the time-marking. Keep an eye out for Robert Knepper, aka *Prison Break*'s T-Bag, as a Snow toadie.

EXTRAS The director/producer commentary is a bit self-congratulatory, and doesn't justify their decision to pad out sections of the book rather than tightening it. But there are plenty of little insights, like the revelation that the shot of Buttercup chasing torchlight required extensive CGI, like a kind of feline *Gravity*. You also get a tribute to Philip Seymour Hoffman, making-of, Lorde music video and deleted scenes.

NICK DE SEMLYEN

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

**THE WATER DIVINER** 2014

Out March 19 / Rated M / Director Russell Crowe / Cast Russell Crowe, Jai Courtney, Ryan Corr, Olga Kurylenko

RUSSELL CROWE'S ASSURED DIRECTORIAL DEBUT IS affectingly old-fashioned, rich in emotion and visually splendid. Outback water diviner Connor (Crowe) promises his late wife to find their sons, missing in Gallipoli. Encountering scepticism from Lt-Col Hughes (Courtney), Connor's only Turkish ally is Major Hassan (soulful Yilmaz Urgodan). Andrew Lesnie's cinematography provides a handsome backdrop, though the journey suffers credibility issues, and a romantic subplot involving Kurylenko is superfluous. Still, fine performances and genuine passion overcome the flaws.

EXTRAS Making-of. (Unpreviewed)

JOHN CATANIA

FILM ★★★★

B-R DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY

3D DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON 3D BLU-RAY

DD DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

UV DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ULTRAVIOLET

BONUS
FEATURE

WE ARE FAMILY

Taking a break from blockbuster-ville, Shawn Levy talks sibling rivalry

UP UNTIL NOW, SHAWN LEVY'S FILMS HAVE NOT exactly been renowned for subtlety and nuanced performances. The *Night At The Museum* movies, *Real Steel*, *Date Night*: all frothy, big-budget romps, waved aside by critics. But with his new effort, *This Is Where I Leave You*, he's boldly striding into new, more grown-up territory.

"When I was at film school, I always thought I would make small, intimate, bittersweet stories," he says. "Then I started to find success with big, broad comedies. Finally, on my tenth movie, I'm getting to do what I thought I'd do with my first. No robots. No dinosaurs. Just people talking and having feelings. I pounced on this because I had a keen sense the summer before last that if I didn't, I'd blink and be a decade more down the road. And then I'd be full of shit, because I never had the balls to say, 'Stop the train. I'm going to try something different.'"

When Levy was three years old, his parents divorced. It was the beginning of a dark decade: when *Empire* brings up the subject, his voice chokes and his trademark breeziness falters a little. "Sorry, I don't really speak about this," he says. "I'll just say, beyond the divorce itself, there were issues involving certain family members that made for some tough years in my childhood. But I made a decision very young to live in a light and positive place. I was determined not to get sucked into a place of sadness that could swallow me up."

To escape the tension, he and his sister would hunker down in their Montreal home to binge on favourite TV shows *Three's Company*, *The Love Boat* and *Remington Steele*. Then, at the age of 13, he moved in with his father and stepmother. His new home was a boisterous,



Director Shawn Levy and star Jason Bateman get intimate details of *The Force Awakens* from Adam Driver (centre). Presumably.

noisy, messy one, with four other children running around and his stepmum, Leigh, frequently working out to Jane Fonda exercise tapes. Little Shawn finally felt like a normal kid.

This Is Where I Leave You is, he says, a "love letter" to that period and by far his most personal work. Based on a novel by Jonathan Tropper, this tale of a dysfunctional East Coast family stars Jason Bateman, Tina Fey, Adam Driver and Corey Stoll as the siblings. And as their mum, a fake-boobed over-sharer, none other than Jane Fonda.

"I flew my stepmum to New York and had dinner with her and Jane," says Levy, still marvelling at the circularity of it all. "Jane took a photo of Leigh's watch and wore the same one in the movie. And her hairdo is also inspired by Leigh. It was so wild to see them together."

Like the Altmans, the movie's fictional family, the director has sat shiva, the Jewish ritual of mourning which involves relatives spending seven days in close proximity receiving visitors. "Having been through it a couple of times, I think it's kind of a genius thing. In the moment where the impulse is to retreat, it forces you to reconnect. When I sat shiva for my grandparents, it's the best time I've ever had with my brothers and sisters."

Most of the filming took place inside a real house in Long Island, so the shoot for *This Is Where I Leave You* was equally confined. "My favourite keepsakes from the movie are my iPhone pictures with the 11 actors and me squashed into the upstairs bedroom or out in the front yard, chatting," Levy says. "The proximity created a good intimacy." Another mellow smile. He's about the least intense director *Empire*'s ever met; does he never lose his shit?

"I'm not a yeller," the filmmaker ponders smiling. "But I figured out somewhere between *Night At The Museum* and *Night At The Museum 2* that if I don't have protein every three hours I become a fucking bitch. So now, if you were to visit my set, you will see that they often put a very nicely appointed plate in front of me containing four slices of apple, peanut butter, rolled-up turkey, thinly sliced pieces of sharp cheddar, olives and almonds. Tina Fey always mocks me up about it, but I have to have it or I become a little mean. Now you've got the Shawn Levy dark side!"

ENDS



THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU 2014

Out Now / Rated M / Director Shawn Levy / Cast Jason Bateman, Tina Fey, Jane Fonda

REAL STEEL DIRECTOR SHAWN LEVY GETS intimate with this bittersweet dramedy about siblings united in grief and bickering after the death of their father. The polished aesthetic feels a little at odds with the material, but there's an admirable honesty to it along with strong performances.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes and slick featurettes that feel a little too pleased with themselves. **NEV PIERCE**
FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

"No robots. No dinosaurs. Just people talking and feeling."

From the archive: Jennifer Lawrence On *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*

PLAY REWIND



Clint was devoted to preserving his eight-track collection.

THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT

1974 B-R

Daylight robbery

Out April 1 / Rated M / Director Michael Cimino / Cast Clint Eastwood, Jeff Bridges, George Kennedy



ULTIMATUMS ARE NOT THE KIND OF thing you issue willy-nilly to Clint Eastwood, but back in 1974 the script for *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot* came with one: namely that its young writer, Michael Cimino, direct. Given that later Cimino would supposedly help sink its studio, United Artists probably wished Eastwood had told the young tyro where to get off. But he was impressed

enough to give the kid a chance, and the result is one of the most offbeat, sunnily odd studio offerings of the decade: a tender shaggy-dog story with a heart of pure weird. Everybody's in cracking form: George Kennedy, as thug Red Leary, performs miraculous pirouettes around slapstick and violence while Bridges's Lightfoot, a delinquent flower-child with a falsetto giggle (let's not get into the utterly unrepressed homoeroticism that drenches the thing),

discharges a star wattage that Clint is wise enough to bask in rather than compete with. The pleasing result is a performance even more laconic than usual. Being nearly overshadowed once was enough; the next time he embarked on a buddy movie his co-star would be a less dashing orangutan called Clyde...

EXTRAS None.

ADAM SMITH

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★ TRANSFER ★★★★★



PUMPING IRON

1977 B-R

Out Now / Rated PG / Directors George Butler, Robert Fiore / Cast Arnold Schwarzenegger, Lou Ferrigno

GIVEN THE DETERMINATION, AMBITION AND EXPERT manipulation skills the young Arnie displayed in this body building documentary, politics was inevitable. Manipulation and backstabbing is rife in the cutthroat world of weightlifting, and there are some great moments of light relief when the men's antics at home are witnessed. Chronicling the 1975 Mr. Olympia contest, where Schwarzenegger faced off against TV Hulk Lou Ferrigno, this is now more a compelling document of his days before superstardom than it is a real insight into bodybuilding.

EXTRAS A pair of featurettes.

GARETH WOODS

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

TRANSFER ★★★★★



FROM BEYOND

1986 B-R

Out Now / Rated MA15+ / Director Stuart Gordon / Cast Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton, Ted Sorel, Ken Foree

FOLLOWING UP THE DERANGED, SEVERED HEAD sauciness of 1985's *Re-Animator* was always going to be a big ask, but director Stuart Gordon and star Jeffrey Combs attacked the challenge with relish. *From Beyond* is another stab at Lovecraftian science gone mad as perverted Dr. Pretorius (a sleazy Sorel) invents a machine that allows him to see beyond reality... and the creatures that lurk therein to see him. This is the director's cut so expect extra gloopy slime, bonus Barbara Crampton sexpot action and added brain sucking through eye-sockets. Yuck!

EXTRAS Commentaries, interviews, featurettes.

DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

TRANSFER ★★★★★



MONSTER

2003 B-R

Out Now / Rated MA15+ / Director Patty Jenkins / Cast Charlize Theron, Christina Ricci, Bruce Dern, Lee Tergesen

PUTTING ASIDE ALL OF THE HOOPLA THAT WAS MADE at the time about Charlize Theron's physical transformation for her role as serial killer Aileen Wuornos (namely a 14kg weight gain and unflattering prosthetics), *Monster* is, at heart, an affecting and inevitably tragic love story about two survivors adrift at society's fringes. There are dark horrors at play, but director Patty Jenkins' script skilfully humanises a deeply disturbed woman, never sensationalising the grim subject matter. Theron's Oscar winning performance remains a true marvel.

EXTRAS Deleted scenes, making-of, commentary, featurette, more.

JAMES JENNINGS

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★ TRANSFER ★★★★★

B-R DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY

3D DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON 3D BLU-RAY

DD DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

UV DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ULTRAVIOLET

"...and over there is my hot tub."



SAY ANYTHING... 1989

Here comes the boombox

Out Now / Rated M / Director Cameron Crowe / Cast John Cusack, Ione Skye, John Mahoney



PRETTY POISON 1968

B-R

Out Now / Rated M / Director Noel Black / Cast Anthony Perkins, Beverly Garland, Tuesday Weld

STARRING A POST-PSYCHO ANTHONY PERKINS, THEN typecast as a homicidal wackjob, Noel Black's twisted crime caper wrong-foots the audience at every turn. Perkins plays Dennis Pitt, a convicted arsonist on parole. After a chance meeting with Tuesday Weld's Sue Ann Stepanek, the twitchy pyro invents a C.I.A. persona to impress her, little knowing that the teen temptress is more crazy than he is. Written by *Papillon* scribe Lorenzo Semple Jr., the script (a likely influence on Terence Malick's *Badlands*) twists genre conventions, and is greatly aided by strong performances from the leads.

EXTRAS None.

DAVID MICHAEL BROWN

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★ TRANSFER ★★★★



SCUM 1979

B-R

Out Now / Rated R18+ / Director Alan Clarke / Cast Ray Winstone, Phil Daniels, Mick Ford, Julian Firth

BEFORE SHAWSHANK, SCUM WAS "THE DADDY" OF prison films. Remarkable too for its setting in a youth penitentiary. Addressing rape, suicide, corruption, racism and the mix of tedium and horror now familiar in nick-flicks it remains a bristling, if sometimes lumpy serve of *Porridge*. Impossibly fresh-faced Ray Winstone plays ascendant hard man-boy Carlin with the kind of coal-eyed menace that has come to define his career. Meanwhile, director Clarke's use of a mental hospital as a location and Philip Meheux (*Casino Royale*) as DOP creates a superbly lit, drained palette, beautifully wintry on Blu-ray.

EXTRAS Trailers for other films.

DANIEL MURPHY

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★ TRANSFER ★★★★



SWEETLY FUNNY AND UNABASHEDLY

romantic, Cameron Crowe's directorial debut is studded with delightful performances: John Cusack – already the go-to-guy for '80s teen flicks after *The Sure Thing*, *Better Off Dead* and *Stand By Me* – excels as Lloyd Dobler, a high school senior obsessed with prissy Diane (Ione Skye), who is in turn guarded by a madly protective father (an awesome John Mahoney, later to find fame as another memorable dad in *Frasier*).

Crowe's trademark romantic whimsy would reach its apex with *Jerry Maguire* before cloying slightly with the box-office failures *Vanilla Sky* and *Elizabethtown* (not as bad as some people think), but here it's fresh, heartfelt and pretty much irresistible.

Meanwhile the poster-shot of Cusack, boombox held aloft – Peter Gabriel's *In Your Eyes*, erm, booming – remains one of the defining movie images of the late '80s and early '90s and an iconic cultural moment for the generation to whom Canadian author Douglas Coupland would apply the letter X two years later. **EXTRAS** A lonesome theatrical trailer. No sign of the funny commentary with Crowe, Cusack and Skye or the 49 minutes of deleted/extended scenes featured in the UK release.

ADAM SMITH

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★



THE KILLERS 1946

Out Now / Rated M / Director Robert Siodmak / Cast Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, Edmond O'Brien

THE FIRST RIFF ON THE ERNEST HEMINGWAY YARN, (also adapted in 1964 by Don Siegel with tough guy Lee Marvin and Angie Dickinson) Robert 'The Spiral Staircase, Son Of Dracula' Siodmak's classic noir tells the story of a prize-fighting lunk (an amazing Burt Lancaster in his feature film debut) diddled into a robbery by a girl called Kitty (Ava Gardner). It's a perfect storm of brilliant: Lancaster at his most powerful, Gardner at her most va-va-voom, O'Brien giving good Bogart and Siodmak piling on the dread in unforgettable images. The single-take factory heist is as good as it gets.

EXTRAS None.

IAN FREER

FILM ★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

From the archive: The Arnold Schwarzenegger interview



OLED TV – THE NEXT GENERATION

WORDS BENNETT RING

Premium quality viewing just came into your price range...

2014 WAS A SAD YEAR FOR THOSE WHO like to buy new displays. Plasma TVs finally shuffled off this mortal coil, replaced by 4K models that promised incredibly sharp images yet didn't have any 4K source material to play. The good news is the arrival of a new display type

that isn't a total gimmick. Organic Light-Emitting Diode TVs, or OLED TVs for short, have been around for a few years now, but they've been priced beyond the reach of mere mortals, costing around \$20,000 for a 50-inch TV. That all changes with the launch of LG's

55EC930T, the first truly affordable OLED TV to land in Australia. Before we take a look at this groundbreaking product, we're going to explain why OLED technology has display geeks all hot and bothered. So check the sidebar first then read on!

LG 55EC930T CURVED FULL HD OLED WEBOS SMART+ TV

AS THE FIRST "AFFORDABLE" OLED TV IN Australia, the LG 55EC930T has an awful lot to prove. Thankfully it does so with aplomb, even before it's turned on. Upon removing the TV from its cardboard packaging, it's impossible not to be impressed with the incredibly skinny screen. It's an edgeless design, which means the picture seems to stretch all the way to each side. We're not huge fans of the curved design, but at least the curvature is relatively modest. The stand is subtle and slim, tying in nicely with the razor-sharp lines of the TV itself.

A total of four HDMI inputs are included, along with Component and Composite Inputs, which sit alongside an Ethernet port and Optical out. Wi-Fi connectivity is built-in, making it a cinch to connect to your home network to make the most of the TV's Smart

features. The LG store has loads of apps that can be downloaded and installed for free.

The motion-controlled remote is a breeze to use, working just like a Nintendo Wii remote wand. Passive 3D is also included, with four sets of glasses included, but we still prefer the active type of stereoscopic 3D used by non-LG TVs, which doesn't suffer from a drop in resolution. Speaking of which, this set runs at a native resolution of 1920 x 1080. That mightn't sound like much in today's 4K-saturated world, but is perfect for a screen of this size.

So, how does the 55EC930T look while in action? In a word – breathtaking. The stratospheric contrast ratio imbued each image with a level of detail that we're simply not accustomed to seeing, while punching out an incredibly

bright image. Even with the white level cranked to an eye-scorching 180 cd/m², which is 50 per cent higher than the reference level, blacks weren't compromised in the slightest, which is simply impossible by LCD standards. Our *Dark Knight* test disc showed intricate details that we'd never seen before.

After watching a couple of films on the LG 55EC930T, we have no doubts that OLED technology actually lives up to the hype. We haven't been this excited about a TV since first checking out Pioneer's amazing Plasma range so many years ago, and can't wait to see what 2015 brings as rival companies introduce their own OLED sets. In the meantime, this TV delivers one of the finest viewing experiences we've ever had.

RATING ★★★★

PRICE \$3999

URL www.lg.com.au

THE TOP 5 BENEFITS OF OLED TVs

1 OLED TVs ARE SKINNY.

Slimmer than the slightest LCD TVs. The main panel of the LG model is just 6mm thick, although it does bulge out to a depth of 44mm in the raised section that houses most of the electronics. This also makes OLED TVs very light, perfect for mounting on walls.

2 CONTRAST RATIO.

One of the most important specifications when it comes to TV image quality, it's a measurement of the difference between the blackest blacks and whitest whites. With an infinite contrast ratio, OLED boasts a much more detailed image, especially in dark scenes.

3 VIEW FROM ANY ANGLE.

On other screens the image fades out the further off-centre each viewer sits, which isn't ideal for groups of people. On OLED, no matter the angle the screen is seen from, the image is clear.

4 NO MOTION BLUR.

The pixels in an LCD TV take longer to switch on and off than the pixels in an OLED TV. This means that OLEDs don't suffer from motion blur displaying rapid movement.

5 CURVED SCREENS.

You'll be happy to hear that OLEDs are happy to get bent. We're not sold on this though, as it can distort the image slightly for viewers who aren't plonked directly in the centre of the screen.

CAVEAT: OLEDs can suffer screen burn-in, like Plasmas of old. Stationary images shouldn't be displayed for longer than an hour, lest we end up with that very same image stamped onto the screen for time immemorial.



RENE RUSSO

Will she get the gold cup, or the tin one?



1 In *The Thomas Crown Affair*, which painting is stolen first?

Ha! Oh, this is going to be a disaster. Was it the dude with the apple? Do I get a point for *Dude With The Apple*? C'mon, that's the name! You know, I never watched that movie. Oh, it's good? Thank you.

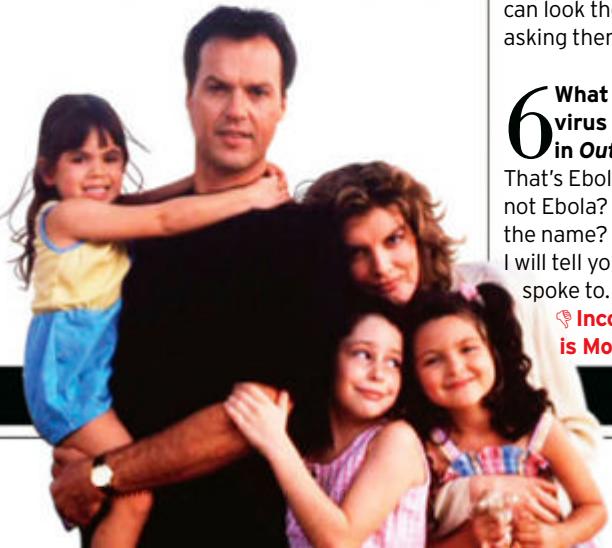
Incorrect. The correct answer is *San Giorgio Maggiore At Dusk* by Monet ('Dude With The Apple' is from the end of the movie and is actually titled *The Son Of Man*, by Magritte).

2 In *Get Shorty*, Chili compares Karen's performance in *Bride Of The Mutant* to a famous actress. Who is she?

No idea. Judy Holliday? Give me a clue. She hated Joan Crawford? Bette Davis! Let me have that! You're giving me clues now. You're pitying me.

Correct (Kind of.)

3 Name two of the three girls you and Michael Keaton take in in *One Good Cop*.



Ha ha. Well, obviously I know that one. That's easy. They are Annie, Jennifer and Elaine. No, don't check. I'm right.

Incorrect. They are Marian, Barbara and Carol.

4 In *Thor: The Dark World*, who is Frigga protecting when she's attacked by Malekith's men?

Oh, Jane. Lovely Jane. I'm so glad that wasn't about the Marvel universe. I'd have been in trouble.

Correct.



5 Name all three bad guys in *The Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle*.

Well, Natasha, obviously. The little guy... Boris! And the other one was... Robert De Niro. Your readers are going to think I'm a fool. Ha ha. I remember nothing.

1/2 point. The other one is Fearless Leader.

"I'm going to get on Google to see if I can look these up faster than you're asking them. You'd never know."

6 What is the name of the virus that's being fought in *Outbreak*?

That's Ebola. What do you mean, it's not Ebola? Are you lying? We changed the name? Well, I researched Ebola. I will tell you all about the doctors I spoke to.

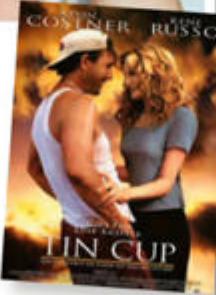
Incorrect. The correct answer is Motaba.



7 What kind of doctor is Doctor Molly Griswold in *Tin Cup*?

She is a therapist. She is a psychologist.

Correct.



8 How much is the ransom initially demanded in *Ransom*?

Who knows? I'm just gonna pick a number... A million dollars. Is that right?

Incorrect. The correct answer is \$2 million. ("Oof. So close.")

9 Name the team in *Major League*.

Oh, come on. What is it? It's the Indians. The Cleveland Indians.

Correct.

10 What is Lorna's rank in *Lethal Weapon 3*?

I know this. I know this. I know I know this. She's the same as

Riggs. And... they are both... sergeant!

Come on, we're doing it now.

Correct.

OLLY RICHARDS

"Oh, that was hilarious. People stop me in the street and say, 'I loved you as Lynn!' and I have no idea what they're talking about. You should ask my in-laws. They remember everything."



NIGHTCRAWLER IS OUT ON DVD AND BLU-RAY ON APRIL 1.

THE SCOREBOARD

Robert Rodriguez, Alexander Payne, Quentin Tarantino, Sir Christopher Lee, Sir Ben Kingsley, David Zucker, David O. Russell	9 POINTS
Guillermo del Toro	8.5
Werner Herzog	8.5
Christian Slater	8.5
John Waters	8
Bryan Singer	8
Hank Azaria	7.5
William Friedkin	7.5
Paul Greengrass	7.5
Jack Black	7.5
Frank Darabont	7.5
Simon Pegg	7.5
Richard Linlithgow	7
Corey Feldman	7
George A. Romero	7
David Koepp	7
Roger Corman	7
Dolph Lundgren	7
Kevin Smith	7
Dario Argento	7
Paul Schrader	6.5
Andy Serkis	6.5
Benicio Del Toro	6.5
John Landis	6.5
Warwick Davis	6.5
Shane Meadows	6.5
Phillip Noyce	6.5
Sigourney Weaver	6.5
Antonio Banderas	6
Billy Bob Thornton	6
Malcolm McDowell	6
Willem Dafoe	6
Cameron Crowe	6
Joe Dante	6
Baz Luhrmann	6
Brett Ratner	6
Brendan Fraser	6
Dwayne Johnson	6
Jeff Bridges	6
Robert Englund	6
Judd Apatow	6
Sean Bean	6
James Cameron	6
Rene Russo	5.5
Andy Garcia	5.5
Danny Trejo	5.5
Jason Flemyng	5.5
Bob Hoskins	5.5
John Malkovich	5.5
Jean-Claude Van Damme	5.5
Don Cheadle	5.5
Jerry Zucker	5
Jim Sheridan	5
Renny Harlin	5
John McGinley	5
Judd Apatow	5
John Leguizamo	5
Peter Stormare	5
Edward Zwick	5
Terry Gilliam	5
Pete Postlethwaite	5
Lloyd Kaufman	5
Joel Silver	5
Roland Emmerich	4.5
Billy Connolly	4.5
Eva Mendes	4.5
Sam Neil	4
Christopher Guest	4
Barry Levinson	4
John Rhys-Davies	4
George Miller	4
Jean Reno	4
Wes Craven	4
Joan Allen	4
Frank Oz	4
John Hurt	4
Chris Cooper	4
John Woo	4
Heather Graham	4
Samuel L. Jackson	4
Ewan McGregor	4
John Carpenter	3
Michael Keaton	3
Steve Guttenberg	3
Lance Henriksen	3
Diane Lane	2

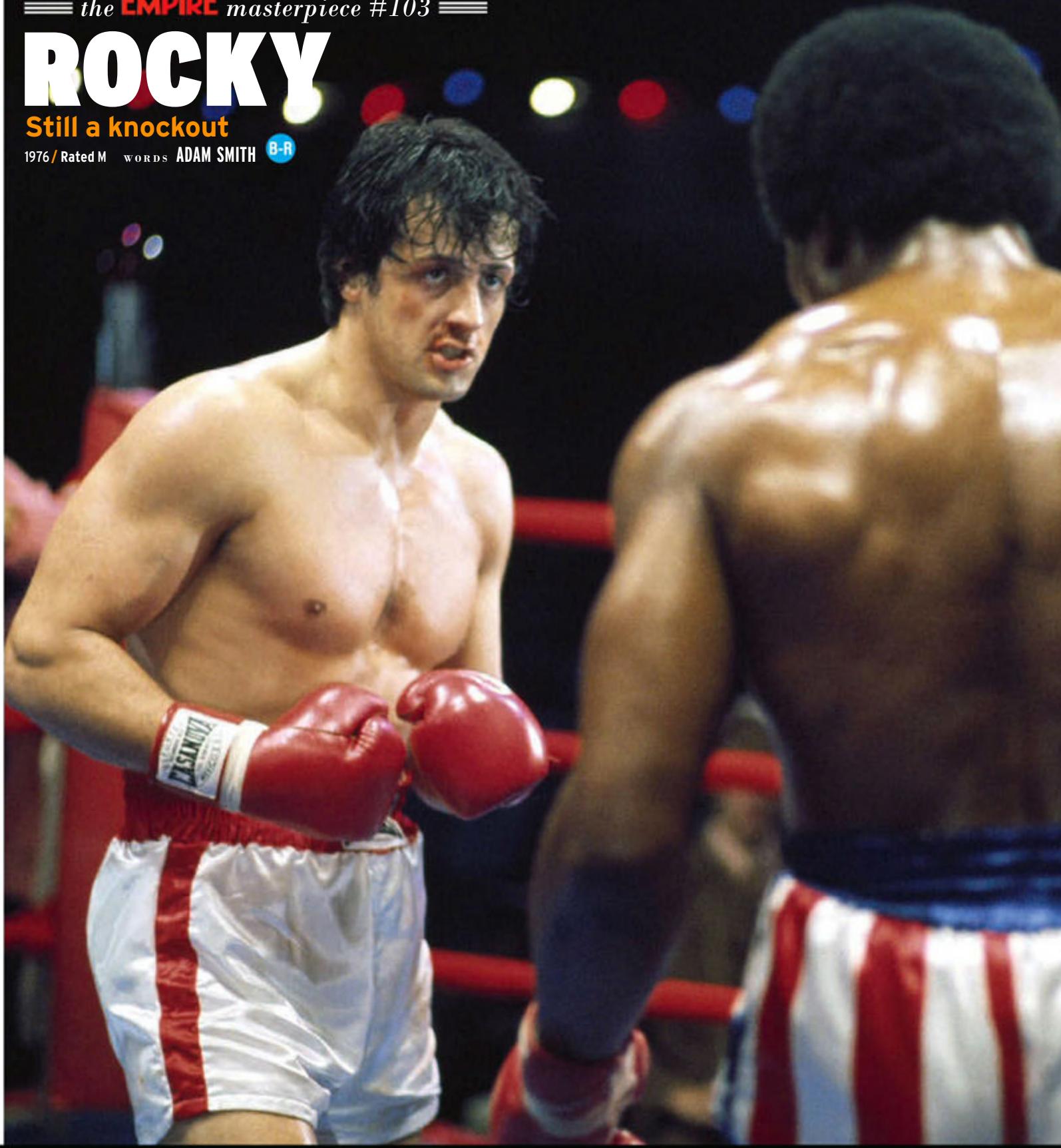
PLAY

the **EMPIRE** masterpiece #103

ROCKY

Still a knockout

1976 / Rated M WORDS ADAM SMITH B-R



B-R DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY

3D DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE ON 3D BLU-RAY

DD DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

UV DENOTES ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ULTRAVIOLET



Will he or won't he?
Stallone's Rocky Balboa
squares up to Carl
Weathers's Apollo Creed.



IN THE SPRING OF 1975, Sylvester Stallone was at best a marginal Hollywood presence with a softcore porn movie and a few bit parts behind him (including *Bananas'* 'Subway Thug #1', which involved him beating up Woody Allen). He was also a man with a mere \$106 in his bank account. Still, one morning he looked at a cheque for \$265,000 made out in his name, pondered briefly the difference that such a sum would make to his and his wife's lives, and threw it in the bin.

The other name on the cheque was that of big-hitter studio United Artists, then home of James Bond. What Stallone was refusing to sell them was a screenplay. He had famously written *Rocky* in three-and-a-half days, fired with enthusiasm, after watching the historic Muhammad Ali/Chuck Wepner fight in which Wepner, a boxer widely expected to exit the

been determined to go with a mid-level draw in the title role (James Caan and Ryan O'Neal were among the names floated) to bolster the marginal bankability of the whole project, which, they predicted, might make a couple of million before slinking off to TV. Stallone's truculence paid off. Legendary producers Irwin Winkler and Robert Chartoff, who had been given pretty much free reign at UA to greenlight low-budget projects, finally caved and gave him the starring role, provided he work for scale and that the movie come in at a ridiculously small \$1.1 million. They were also sharp enough to insist on a director with form: John G. Avildsen, a quality journeyman with a reputation for efficiency (and who would go on to cannily repackage *Rocky* for the teen market as *The Karate Kid* in 1984).

The film that emerged, to enthusiastic reviews and stunning box office, is a unique bridge

switching gears after the iconic training montage, he shifts the film to triumphal territory, but with a masterstroke of a kicker. In Stallone's original version, Balboa had finally thrown the fight. Instead, Avildsen had him punch on, and then obscured the actual result in a swiftly chopped finale. Stallone wanted it to be crystal clear that Rocky had lost, but Avildsen realised that this, if mishandled, would be a downer for a film whose structure had been on the dramatic ascent. In the end he had his way: audiences, leaving on an emotional high, only realised later that Balboa had been defeated, yet still felt good about the outcome. It's a daring structural gambit, and would likely get smothered in the crib today.

Rocky would go on to make \$225 million and spawn five sequels. 1979's *Rocky II*, despite straining to re-establish Balboa's underdog credibility, has some of

“Those final few moments are as good as Hollywood has ever been.”

ring on a stretcher within seconds, in fact went a full 15 gruelling rounds. "That night I went home and I had the beginning of my character," Stallone wrote shortly after the film's release. "I had him now... a man from the streets... the all-American tragedy, a man who didn't have much mentality but had incredible emotion and patriotism and spirituality and good nature, even though life had not been good to him. He was America's child. He was to the '70s what Chaplin's Little Tramp was to the '20s."

At heart, Stallone's story is not particularly audacious. It follows a small-time goon who, after falling in love with a shy girl whose brother is over-protective, is bribed to throw a fight. But what he could see, and what had been missed by the various producers who had read the screenplay, was that *Rocky* was that rarest of things: a bona fide starmaker. And he fully intended to be the star that it made. United Artists had originally

between the kind of movies Hollywood, freed from the shackles of the studio system, had been making for the past decade and the ones it was about to be straitjacketed into. Surprisingly, fisticuffs take up a scant 10 minutes of its running time. What *Rocky* is full of is human, rather than pugilistic conflict. Avildsen channels a pop-Cassavetes sensibility, casting established character actors around the new star. Burt Young, tiny eyes bulging out of a Toby Jug face, is a ball of conflicted energy. Burgess Meredith is a hair's-breadth away from cliché as the gruff but finally supportive coach, while Talia Shire is agonising as the girl who looks frightened even of the budgies in her down-at-heel pet shop.

Avildsen allows all these great characters room and time to establish themselves, and shoots the grimy meatpacking district of Philadelphia with a sharp eye for moody detail. Then, smoothly

the rough-hewn charm of its progenitor. But by *Rocky III*, perhaps unnerved by the arrival of a certain Austrian, Stallone had embarked on a ghastly transformation. The blue-collar authenticity evaporated, replaced by oiled lats and oilier off-the-peg patriotism. He slowly became a work of living kitsch: a walking, talking Jeff Koons artwork.

Legendary libertine and movie producer Don Simpson once said that the perfect movie should end on a freeze-frame. He probably wasn't thinking of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* when he made the remark, but of *Rocky*. Despite the descent of Stallone's career into terminal self-parody, finding its autumnal expression in the tiresome *Expendables* franchise, those final few moments, as Bill Conti's masterly score thunders to its pitch-perfect climax, are as good as Hollywood has ever been or will ever get. Laydeez 'n' gennelmen... Rocky Balboa!

EMPIRE

GIVEAWAYS AND PUZZLERS

EMPIRE CROSSWORD

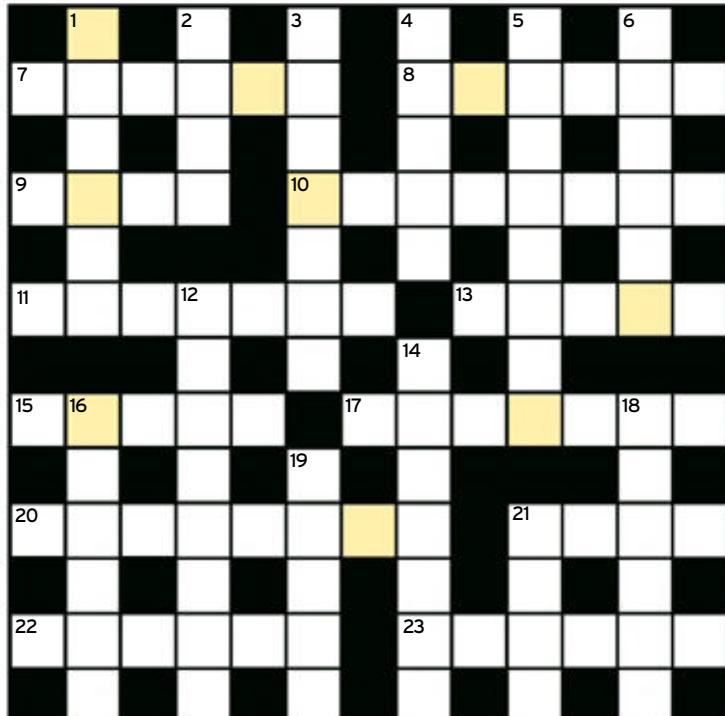
Think you know movies?
Put your skills to the test!

ACROSS

- 7 Audrey Tautou film that was nominated for five Oscars in 2002 (6)
- 8 Ewan McGregor's smooth-to-the-touch goldmine (6)
- 9 Christian Bale escorted Russell Crowe to board the 3.10 to this destination (4)
- 10 Brat Pack Molly (8)
- 11 Film nominated for nine Oscars this year (7)
- 13 It chronicles Martin Luther King's march to Montgomery (5)
- 15 Singer in *Brimstone & Treacle* (5)
- 17 Send dog in another form to find a 2004 De Niro starrer (7)
- 20 Director whose first feature film was *Poor Cow* (3,5)
- 21 Cocaine, as delivered by Johnny Depp in 2001 (4)
- 22 Did this provide Frank Sinatra with plenty of kicks? (3,3)
- 23 Stanley Kubrick's clockwork fruit (6)

DOWN

- 1 Actor seen in *East Is East* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2,4)
- 2 Jessica cast as Sartana Rivera in *Machete* (4)
- 3 This actress famously met Billy Crystal in



Katz's Delicatessen (3,4)

4 Chris who is Captain America (5)

5 Sounds perfect, this Michael Caine-Demi Moore caper (8)

6 Elizabeth Hurley and Craig Fairbrass went beyond it in 1994 (6)

12 Lyricist for several 007 themes and *Born Free* etc. (3,5)

14 Richard Linklater's 12-year epic (7)

16 Elijah Wood-Kevin Costner film tagged

"What's worth fighting for?" (3,3)

18 Lupita, Patsey in *12 Years A Slave* (6)

19 The kind of diaries kept by Scarlett Johansson (5)

21 Could be Bridges, could be Geste (4)

MARCH ANSWERS: ACROSS: 7 Laurie, 8 Morgan, 9 Beau, 10 Wahlberg, 11 J.J. Feild, 13 Fatal, 15 Anger, 17 Big Eyes, 20 Meat Loaf, 21 Sirk, 23 Gerard, 24 Sheedy.

DOWN: 1 Babe, 2 Crouse, 3 Beowulf, 4 Omaha, 5 Arabia, 6 Fair Game, 12 Jon Heder, 14 Big Fish, 16 Extras, 18 Eisley, 19 Fonda, 22 Rudy. **ANAGRAM:** Chris Hemsworth

EMPIRE PUB QUIZ

Put a dollar in the jar

- 1 Name Judi Dench's first Bond film.
- 2 Slartibartfast features in which science fiction saga?
- 3 Penelope Wilton plays the mother of the lead character in which 2004 British comedy?
- 4 Dev Patel was first suggested for *Slumdog Millionaire* after Danny Boyle's daughter, Caitlin, saw him in which British teen TV drama?
- 5 Who appears in both *Sister Act* and the *Harry Potter* film series?
- 6 Which two films star both Richard Gere and Julia Roberts?
- 7 Tom Wilkinson has been nominated for an Oscar twice. For which films?
- 8 What are the subtitles for *Nativity 2* and *Nativity 3*?
- 9 Who plays Edward R. Murrow in 2005's *Good Night, And Good Luck*?
- 10 Deborah Moggach's novel *These Foolish Things* inspired which 2012 India-set British comedy-drama?

PUB QUIZ ANSWERS: 1 *Goldfinger* (1965).
2 *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.
3 *Shawshank Redemption* (1994).
4 *Pretty Woman* (1990).
5 *Magdalene Smith*.
6 *Pretty Woman* (1990).
7 *In The Bedroom* (2001) and *Michael Clayton* (2007).
8 *Nativity 3: Danger in the Manger*?
9 *Daniel Day-Lewis*.
10 *The Best Man* (1989).
11 *David Strathairn*.
12 *The Best Man* (1989).
13 *Angela Lansbury*.
14 *Julia Roberts*.
15 *Richard Gere*.
16 *Julia Roberts*.
17 *Julia Roberts*.
18 *Julia Roberts*.
19 *Julia Roberts*.
20 *Julia Roberts*.
21 *Julia Roberts*.
22 *Julia Roberts*.
23 *Julia Roberts*.

WIN! PRIDE ON DVD

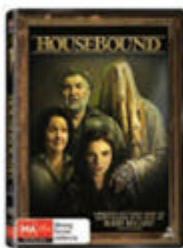
FRESH FRESH FROM ITS WARMLY received cinema release, experience the *Billy Elliot* of the decade so far with the inspiring, unlikely true story of a group of gay activists who rally behind striking miners in 1984. Ten DVDs are up for grabs.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE FEEL-GOOD FLICK IS, AND WHY.

WIN! HOUSEBOUND ON DVD

THE KIWIS DELIVER AGAIN WITH this choice horror-comedy as a tearaway on home detention with her mum faces creaking floorboards and creepy happenings. Ten copies of this haunted house chiller with a difference are on offer.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE HAUNTED HOUSE MOVIE IS, AND WHY.

WIN! PRETTY POISON, SCUM AND THE KILLERS ON DVD

SET YOUR NERVE-METER to thrill with this triple pack of cult classics including *Pretty Poison* with Anthony Perkins, *Scum* with a young Ray Winstone and *The Killers* with Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner. One of five packs could be yours.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE CULT MOVIE IS, AND WHY.

EMPIRE

CAPTION COMP

FILM: *Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder OUT*: TBC 2015

THIS SELF-PROCLAIMED NORWEGIAN STINKER PROMISES hijinks galore as two young scamps help the titular Doc spread the waft about his dubious invention. Who said Scandi cinema had to be serious? Not that we want you to be, as the funniest caption wins a couple of slabs of Ozploitation soundtrack goodness. That's *Turkey Shoot* on CD and *Chain Reaction* on vinyl, thanks to Dual Records.



HOW TO ENTER
Use the free viewa app to scan this page. Then fill in the on-screen form with your 10 words or less caption and hit SUBMIT. The winner will be published in the June 2015 edition of Empire.



[Your caption here O' reader!]

FEBRUARY 2015 WINNER

"I can see clearly now the door has gone!"

Congratulations Holly Flynn! You score a swag bag of HBO delights on DVD including *Banshee* S2, *True Blood* S7, *The Newsroom* S2 and *Boardwalk Empire* S5.



WIN! MISS MEADOWS ON BLU-RAY OR DVD

DON'T MESS WITH MISS Meadows (Katie Holmes) the school teacher variant of a *Pulp Fiction* Mary Poppins. Cross her and it's a bullet in your noggin. Dare to enter to win on BD or DVD.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE TEACHER IS, AND WHY.

WIN! KILL THE MESSENGER ON DVD

JEREMY RENNER GIVES THE performance of his career as dogged investigative journo Garry Webb who revealed a major drug conspiracy involving the US government. Get sleuthing and dig up an entry to win one of five copies we have up for grabs on DVD.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE WHISTLEBLOWER MOVIE IS, AND WHY.

WIN! REACH ME ON BLU-RAY OR DVD

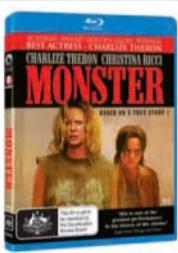
IT'S THE CRASH OF THE self-help milieu as a gaggle of characters played by a galaxy of stars (Sly plays an editor, now that's aspirational!) find their lives changed by a motivational book.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE INSPIRATIONAL MOVIE IS, AND WHY.

WIN! MONSTER ON BLU-RAY

HER PERFORMANCE AS AILEEN Wuornos, a Daytona Beach prostitute turned serial killer, gave Charlize Theron an Oscar and audiences a chance to see that she was more than just a pretty face. Check out how good she is by winning one of five BDs.



TO WIN, TELL US WHO YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE SERIAL KILLER IS, AND WHY.

WIN! A THOUSAND TIMES GOOD NIGHT ON DVD

INSPIRED BY DIRECTOR ERIK Poppe's experience as a war photographer in the 1980s, Juliette Binoche and GOT's Nikolaj Coster-Waldau star in a story of passion clashing with familial duty. Five copies are ready to be snapped up.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE WAR MOVIE IS, AND WHY.

WIN! FROM BEYOND ON DVD

FROM THE PULP HORROR FICTION PEN of H.P. Lovecraft, and the team behind *Re-animator*, comes the extended director's cut of this spine-tingling genre cult classic where the dark recesses of the mind are perversely unleashed. Curdle up your entry to win one of five copies on DVD.



TO WIN, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE '80S HORROR MOVIE IS, AND WHY.

TO WIN ANY OF THESE PRIZES, EMAIL US AT EMPIREGIVEAWAYS@BAUER-MEDIA.COM.AU, WRITE THE PRIZE IN THE SUBJECT LINE, YOUR PREFERRED FORMAT IF THERE ARE both DVD or Blu-ray options and complete the answer in 25 words or less, not forgetting to include your contact details. All competitions are open to both Australian and New Zealander Empire readers. Entries close April 22.

For conditions of entry visit www.bauer-media.com.au/terms/competition-terms



EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

GIANT

(1956) "My well came in, Bick."

Rated PG / Director / Screenwriters Fred Guiol, Ivan Moffatt / Cast James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson

SETTING THE SCENE

Decades before *There Will Be Blood*, 1956 oil epic *Giant* told a riveting tale of relationships torn apart by the black stuff. Jordan 'Bick' Benedict (Rock Hudson) and his wife Leslie (Elizabeth Taylor) are the wealthy couple living on Texan ranch Reata. Jett Rink (James Dean), who secretly loves Leslie, is the poor labourer working for Bick's sister. Then one day his ragged bit of land yields a gusher, and his suppressed emotions pour out.

EXT. REATA VERANDA – DAY
The Benedict family is sitting around, enjoying the warm summer evening. The peace is interrupted by

Jett's truck, which careens into the driveway and comes to a stop with a screech of brakes. Jett emerges, drenched in oil and inebriated.

Bick: Hello, Jett. What do you want?
[Jett staggers forward, raising his arms.]

Jett: My well came in, Bick.
[He laughs maniacally.]

Bick: Fine.
Leslie: Well, that's wonderful, Jett.
Jett: Everybody thought I had a duster! Y'all thought ol' Spindletop and ol' Burk Burnett was all the oil there was, didn't you? But I'm here

to tell you it ain't, boy. It's here. And there ain't a dang thing you gonna do about it. My well came in big. So big, Bick. And there's more down there and there's bigger wells.
[He advances towards them.]

Jett: I'm rich, Bick. [Chuckling] I'm a rich 'un. I'm a rich boy. Me, I'm gonna have more money than you ever thought you could have. You and all of the rest of you stinkin' sons of Benedict.

Bick: Leslie, you go out in the house. Take the women with you.

Leslie: Jett, we're real glad you struck it. Now you go on along home.

Jett: My, you sure do look pretty, Miss Leslie. You always did look pretty. Just pretty nigh good enough to eat.

[*Bick lunges forward and slugs Jett in the jaw. Jett falls to the ground, then slowly gets to his feet.*]

Jett: My, you're tetchy, Bick. Testy as an old cook.

[*Without warning, he hits Bick in the face, pummels him in the ribs and runs down the steps. He gets back in his truck and drives away.*]

Bawley (Chill Wills): Bick, you shoulda shot that fellow a long time ago. Now he's too rich to kill.

THE NEXT ISSUE OF EMPIRE IS ON SALE APRIL 20

JULIETTE BINOCHE NIKOLAJ COSTER-WALDAU



A THOUSAND TIMES GOODNIGHT



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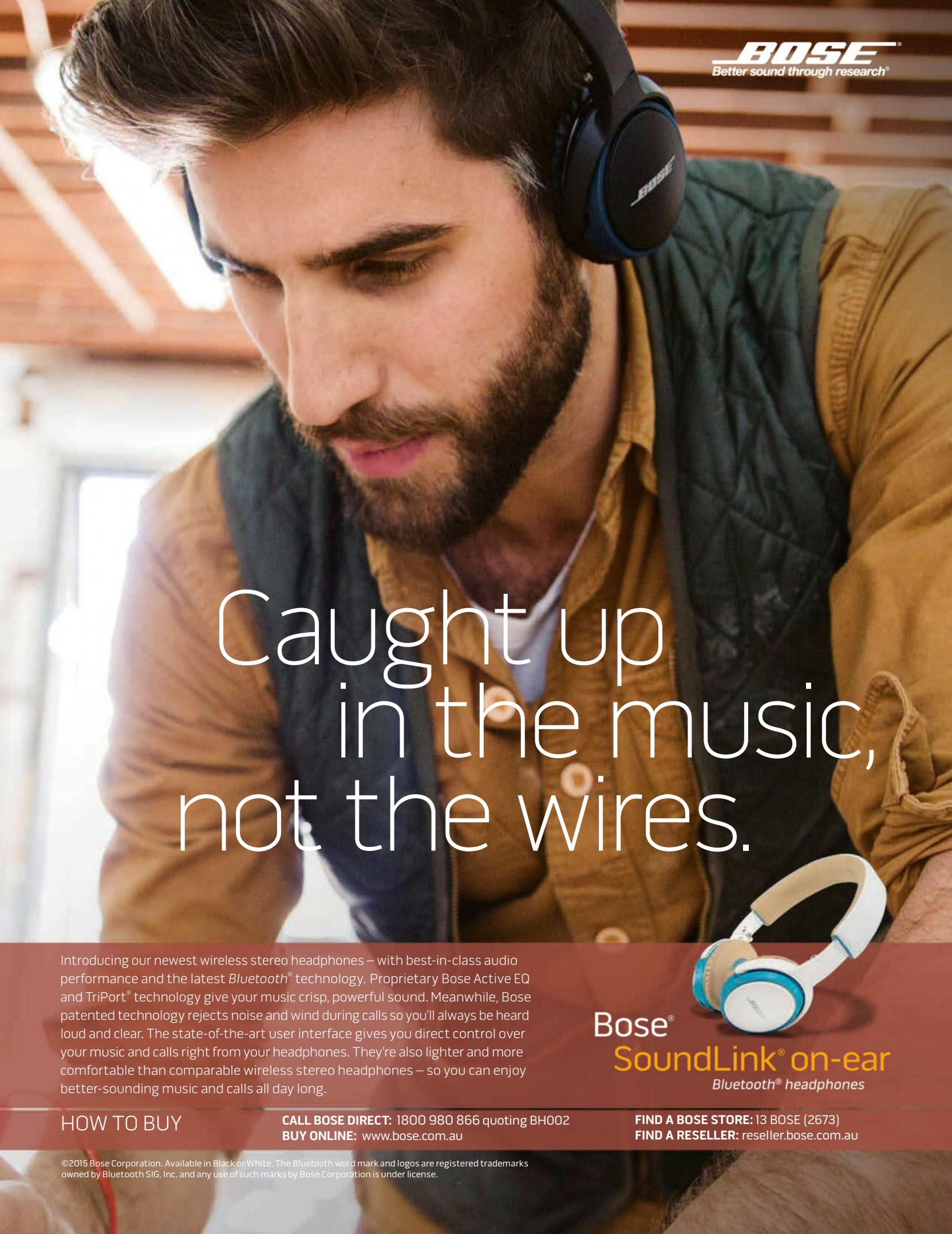


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